

**DAMLA BAL: BENEATH THE RUIN
BARS: A PHILOSOPHICAL AND
EMPIRICAL JOURNEY THROUGH THE
MULTI-LAYERED TOURISM MILIEU OF
BUDAPEST'S PARTY DISTRICT**

2025

CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST

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AND EMPIRICAL JOURNEY THROUGH THE
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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Supervisors: Éva Erdélyi, PhD, Gábor Michalkó, PhD

Damla Bal

Budapest

2025

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Doctoral dissertation

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	8
List of Tables	9
1. INTRODUCTION	10
1.1. Problematizing urban tourism and the evolving nature of place	10
1.2. Contextual focus: District VII as a site of conflict and possibility.....	12
1.3. Research gap and conceptual tensions	13
1.4. Research aim and questions.....	15
1.5. Conceptual propositioning toward a multi-layered tourism milieu model.....	17
1.6. Methodological orientation	21
1.7. Structure of the dissertation.....	23
2. PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PLACE.....	26
2.1. Ontological situatedness.....	26
2.2. Epistemology of place	28
2.3. Phenomenology of place	29
2.4. Anthropology of place.....	31
3. TOURISM MILIEU	33
3.1. Evolving concept of the tourism milieu	33
3.2. Embodied experience in the tourism milieu.....	41
3.3. Cultural dynamics in the tourism milieu	44
4. SENSE OF PLACE	46
4.1. Introduction to sense of place.....	46
4.2. Development of the sense of place concept in tourism studies	50
4.3. Embodied experience and sense of place	52
4.4. Cultural geography and sense of place.....	54
4.5. Core dimensions of sense of place: attachment, identity, dependence, and belonging.....	55
4.6. Cultivating a sense of place.....	63
5. CREATIVE TOURISM.....	65
5.1 Creative tourism: concept, origins, and theoretical foundations	65
5.2 Impacts of creative tourism	67
5.3 Challenges and opportunities in creative tourism	69
5.4. Best practices in creative tourism and stakeholder roles.....	70
5.4.1. Reflections on emerging themes in creative tourism best practices	75
6. DESTINATION CONTEXT – BUDAPEST	78
6.1. Urban transformation and the rise of District VII as a party tourism zone	78

6.2.	Overtourism in Budapest.....	80
6.3.	Rise of party tourism	82
6.4.	Negative impacts of party tourism	84
6.5.	The daytime tourism milieu and the emergent creative landscape in Budapest's Jewish Quarter.....	86
6.6.	Philosophical analysis of the interactions within Budapest's party district	88
7.	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	93
7.1.	Philosophical and epistemological positioning	93
7.2.	Research design overview	95
7.3.	Phase 1: Visual content analysis	99
7.3.1.	Rationale	99
7.3.2.	Data collection	100
7.3.3.	Analytical approach	100
7.3.4.	Researcher's role and reflexivity	101
7.4.	Phase 1: Semi-structured interviews with tourism stakeholders	101
7.4.1.	Rationale and purpose	101
7.4.2.	Participant selection and data collection.....	102
7.4.3.	Analytical approach	103
7.4.4.	Epistemological and interpretive considerations	104
7.5.	Phase 2: In-depth interviews with cultural actors.....	104
7.5.1.	Rationale and purpose	104
7.5.2.	Participant selection and data collection.....	105
7.5.3.	Analytical approach	106
7.5.4.	Epistemological and interpretive considerations	106
7.6.	Ethical Considerations.....	107
8.	RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	109
8.1.	Phase 1: Exploring the tourism milieu through visual and narrative perception 109	
8.1.1.	Visual perception	109
8.1.2.	Narrative Perception.....	118
8.2.	Phase 2: Institutional reflexivity and the constraints of cultural co-creation	138
8.2.1.	Cultural revitalization and urban strategy.....	139
8.2.1.	Institutional and governmental roles	141
8.2.3.	Community engagement and participation	143
8.2.4.	Regulatory and logistical challenges	146
8.2.5.	Cultural identity tensions	149
8.2.6.	Public perception and civic conflict.....	151

9. DISCUSSION	154
9.1. Revisiting the tourism milieu of District VII through situated perception.....	154
9.2. Institutional reflexivity and creative governance in tourism-saturated districts	157
9.3. Creative tourism as a relational strategy for rebalancing urban experience...	159
9.4. Implications for urban tourism governance and policy	161
10. CONCLUSION	164
10.1. Restating the research focus	164
10.2. Key Findings and synthesis	166
10.3. Theoretical contributions.....	170
10.4. Methodological contributions.....	173
10.5. Practical contributions	174
10.6. Limitations of the dissertation and future research directions.....	177
REFERENCES.....	180

List of Figures

Figure 1: The conceptual framework of the study.....	20
Figure 2: The kaleidoscopic structure of the tourist milieu.	38
Figure 3: The number of offerings in private accommodation (including Airbnb) by district in 2019.	81
Figure 4: Pictures of the Szimpla Kert taken in 2019. (a) The exterior architecture of the.....	82
Figure 5: The interior corridor of the Szimpla Kert.	83
Figure 6: The ambiance of Szimpla Kert, pictures taken in 2020.....	89
Figure 7: A party scene at Szimpla Kert in 2020.	90
Figure 8: Location of photos taken in Budapest's party zone.	111
Figure 9: Daytime tourism milieu components of Budapest's party zone.	114
Figure 10: Main components of daytime tourism milieu in Budapest's party zone.	115

List of Tables

Table 1: Chronological overview of key milestones and conceptual shifts in the development of the sense of place.	48
Table 2: Comparative summary of creative tourism cities.....	74
Table 3: Phase 1 research design overview.	96
Table 4: Phase 2 research design overview.	97
Table 5: Interviewee profiles in Phase 1.	102
Table 6: Key thematic components derived from the manual photo coding.....	111
Table 7: Themes identified through the inductive thematic analysis - Phase 1.	118

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Problematizing urban tourism and the evolving nature of place

Urban spaces are dynamic fields of meaning, interaction, and transformation. The concept of place, in this regard, must be understood not simply as a fixed geographical container, but as a relational and evolving construct shaped through lived experience, memory, and symbolic negotiation (Malpas, 1999; Massey, 2005). As Larsen and Johnson (2012) argue, the soul of a place emerges through cumulative human responses to the environment that are continuously inscribed and reinscribed through both everyday inhabitation and transient encounter. In this context, tourism is not a peripheral influence but a core driver of how place is perceived, experienced, and redefined over time.

The transformative power of tourism is particularly visible in urban settings, where it often acts as a catalyst for both revitalisation and disruption. Encounters between tourists and locals, the proliferation of visual representations, and the interventions of policy and planning together shape the affective and symbolic contours of urban space (Degen and Rose, 2012). These transformations reflect deeper ontological shifts in how a place is known, felt, and remembered (Massey, 2005; Merleau-Ponty, 2012). In other words, tourism contributes to an ongoing reconfiguration of the meaning of place that is experiential, perceptual, and political.

This becomes especially salient in contemporary tourism studies, where there has been growing recognition that destinations are not static entities but living, contested spaces. Every tourist encounter introduces new ways of seeing, feeling, and narrating a place. These subjective interactions intersect with broader urban processes such as gentrification, branding, policy fragmentation producing complex and sometimes contradictory spatial outcomes (Michalkó et al., 2022; Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2019). Consequently, destinations become palimpsests: overlaid with successive layers of cultural memory, economic value, and symbolic meaning.

However, much of the tourism literature continues to emphasise quantifiable metrics such as visitor numbers, economic impact, and infrastructure capacity, often at the expense of more nuanced understandings of perception, atmosphere, and community sentiment (Butowski, 2023). This epistemological narrowing has led to insufficient attention to the philosophical dimensions of tourism particularly how knowledge,

meaning, and identity are co-produced within tourism milieus. As Kant (1998) reminds us, experience is not just received but interpreted through pre-existing cognitive structures. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty (2012) highlight that perception is embodied and affective, highlighting the need to consider sensory and emotional dimensions in understanding tourist experience.

Understanding destinations as affective, embodied, and symbolic fields thus calls for a more integrated framework that acknowledges the fluid interplay of tangible and intangible factors, and the layered perceptions of multiple actors. The tourism milieu, as conceptualised by Michalkó and Rátz (2006, 2008), offers an important starting point for this reframing. Defined initially as the physical and functional environment supporting tourism, the milieu also encompasses the intangible elements such as emotions, atmospheres, cultural memory, and collective imaginaries that constitute the experiential depth of place.

This dissertation rests on three interconnected pillars: tourism milieu, sense of place, and creative tourism. Tourism milieu captures the atmospheres, symbols, and socio-spatial dynamics that shape a destination's "vibe." Sense of place emphasizes the emotional and experiential bonds people form with urban environments, highlighting memory, attachment, and identity. Creative tourism provides a strategy for intervening in these dynamics through participation, co-creation, and cultural dialogue. Together, these pillars offer a lens for analyzing urban tourism: milieu as context, sense of place as emotional resonance, and creative tourism as transformative practice.

This dissertation builds on such insights by interrogating how urban tourism shapes and is shaped by place-based identities, institutional practices, and perceptual dynamics. Rather than treating tourism as a unidirectional force of commodification, the study examines how place meanings are co-produced through a multi-actor tourism milieu where perception, governance, and cultural creativity interact in complex ways. In doing so, it foregrounds the need for a more philosophically attuned, experientially rich, and socially reflexive approach to urban tourism theory and practice.

1.2. Contextual focus: District VII as a site of conflict and possibility

Budapest's District VII, comprising Inner, Middle, and Outer Erzsébetváros, offers a particularly fertile terrain for interrogating the complexities of urban tourism, symbolic place transformation, and cultural negotiation. While the district as a whole is diverse, only its Inner Erzsébetváros area is commonly referred to as the Jewish Quarter, historically marked by rich Jewish architectural heritage and a deep cultural-religious legacy. The district has undergone multiple waves of transformation from its emergence as a vibrant merchant and artisan quarter in the late 18th century to its traumatic role as a WWII ghetto, followed by decades of socialist neglect (Kovács, 1994; Mérai and Kulikov, 2024; Szívós, 2015).

In the early 2000s, the district experienced an abrupt cultural and economic shift catalyzed by the emergence of “ruin bars” as creative nightlife venues established in semi-abandoned buildings that came to symbolise post-socialist entrepreneurialism and underground aesthetics (Lugosi et al., 2010). While initially celebrated as spontaneous expressions of urban creativity, these bars quickly became the anchor of Budapest's global party image, attracting mass tourism and altering the socio-spatial character of the district.

This transformation brought both vitality and tension. On the one hand, tourism injected economic activity, international visibility, and infrastructural investment into an area long overlooked by formal planning regimes. On the other hand, the influx of short-term visitors generated significant externalities: noise pollution, overcrowding, inflated housing prices, and a perceptible erosion of local identity and community well-being (Michalkó et al., 2022; Olt et al., 2019). The district's nightlife economy increasingly operated in tension with its residential fabric, producing what many stakeholders described as social fatigue, spatial saturation, and civic detachment.

At the same time, District VII holds significant untapped potential for a different kind of tourism which is rooted in creativity, cultural care, and everyday placemaking. As highlighted in studies on creative urbanism and cultural tourism (Duxbury and Richards, 2019; Richards, 2011), districts with layered histories and contested meanings often become sites of cultural experimentation. In the Jewish Quarter, cultural institutions, local entrepreneurs, and community actors have initiated alternative programming to foster sense of place.

These initiatives hint at an emergent possibility: that tourism in District VII could be recalibrated away from extractive party economies and toward inclusive, community-oriented cultural development. However, the realisation of this potential remains uncertain. Governance fragmentation, uneven institutional support, and symbolic dominance of nightlife branding continue to restrict more pluralistic futures for the district (McCann, 2007; Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019).

This study positions District VII as an emblematic site of conflict and possibility where tourism's negative impacts and progressive alternatives coexist in frictional relation. It provides a powerful lens through which to examine broader themes in post-socialist urban tourism: the commodification of heritage, the fragility of creative spaces, the tension between global narratives and local meaning, and the possibility of repositioning tourism through co-created cultural practice.

By analysing the district's evolving tourism milieu, this dissertation aims to generate actionable insights not only for Budapest but for cities worldwide grappling with the dual imperatives of economic vibrancy and social sustainability. District VII is a contested space of memory, identity, and urban experimentation that is a living laboratory for understanding how tourism can help reimagine the soul of a city.

1.3. Research gap and conceptual tensions

Despite growing scholarly attention to the socio-cultural and spatial consequences of urban tourism, particularly in overtouristed European cities, several theoretical and empirical gaps remain especially regarding how tourism is co-constructed through perception, representation, and governance in post-socialist urban contexts like Budapest. Tourism research has often privileged economic indicators, infrastructure development, and visitor metrics, overlooking the deeper symbolic, affective, and cultural processes through which destinations are continuously made and remade (Butowski, 2023; Page and Duignan, 2023).

This omission is particularly pronounced in urban tourism studies, where the focus has remained on destination competitiveness, place branding, or gentrification, rather than on the lived tensions and emergent possibilities that define the everyday tourism milieu (Ashworth and Page, 2011; Olt et al., 2019). The tourism milieu, first conceptualised by Michalkó and Rátz (2006, 2008), offers a critical lens to fill this gap. However, there is limited integration between the tourism milieu and

philosophical frameworks that examine how place is understood, felt, and contested. Notions such as ontological situatedness (Massey, 2005), epistemology of place, phenomenological perception (Merleau-Ponty, 2012), and the anthropology of place (Hall, 2021) remain peripheral in most tourism studies. These lenses can significantly deepen our understanding of how tourism transforms the meaning of place through embodied experience, symbolic labor, and affective attachment. As Larsen and Johnson (2012) argue, place emerges through interaction, responsiveness, and co-creation; yet few empirical studies explore how such processes operate under conditions of mass tourism and neoliberal urban change.

In the specific case of Budapest's District VII, the existing literature has largely focused on the rise of the ruin bars as expressions of post-socialist creativity (Lugosi et al., 2010), gentrification dynamics (Kovács, 2009), and nightlife-driven place branding (Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019). While these studies provide valuable insights, they do not adequately address how the tourism milieu is perceived differently by tourists, residents, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and cultural actors; how it is felt through both positive and negative sensory modalities; or how progressive, creative, and reparative elements are emerging within this contested space.

This dissertation addresses these conceptual tensions by proposing a reconceptualized tourism milieu model that integrates four analytical layers: ontological situatedness, epistemological framing, experiential modalities, and anthropological mediation. This model builds on and extends the original milieu concept by incorporating philosophical inquiry, empirical data, and a critical understanding of individual and collective perception. By embedding the model in the specific context of District VII and grounding it in qualitative research with multiple actor groups, the study advances both theoretical refinement and practical applicability.

Furthermore, the study contributes to a growing body of tourism theory that approaches tourism not only as economic activity or policy object, but as a reflexive and participatory field of cultural negotiation, place-making, and symbolic transformation (Della Lucia and Trunfio, 2018; Duxbury and Richards, 2019; McCann, 2007). It also bridges conceptual gaps between tourism studies and humanistic geography, cultural planning, and urban studies, providing an

interdisciplinary framework that can be adapted to similar tourism-saturated urban neighborhoods worldwide.

This dissertation situates itself at the intersection of under-theorized terrain: tourism milieus as lived, perceived, and governed entities; post-socialist urban tourism as a context of rapid transformation; and philosophical perspectives on place as tools for interpreting tourism's impact on identity, meaning, and community well-being.

1.4. Research aim and questions

The primary aim of this doctoral dissertation is to examine how the tourism milieu of Budapest's party district is constructed, perceived, and governed, and to explore how this milieu might be redirected toward more culturally grounded, socially inclusive, and creatively co-produced futures. Rather than proposing prescriptive solutions, the research is committed to deep place understanding (Huang et al., 2020; Michalkó, 2023), grounded in lived experience, stakeholder narratives, and contextual complexity. By examining both the symbolic and material dimensions of tourism, the study seeks to uncover tensions, identify progressive elements, and propose context-sensitive strategies for more reflexive tourism governance and planning.

The research is motivated by the concept that the tourism milieu is not a neutral container of tourism activity, but a co-produced, affective, and contested spatial field shaped by individual and collective perception, institutional logic, and creative reimagination (Hall, 2021; Massey, 2005; Michalkó and Rátz, 2006). This milieu is especially dynamic in Budapest's District VII, where ruin bars, party tourism, and creative resistance coexist in an environment marked by post-socialist transition, gentrification, and symbolic rebranding.

To address this complexity, the study is guided by two main empirical research questions, each corresponding to a distinct research phase. These are supported by sub-questions aligned with specific methodological and analytical strategies.

Phase 1: Exploratory - Perception and Representation

RQ1: *How is the tourism milieu of Budapest's Jewish Quarter currently constructed, perceived, and symbolically represented through the visual practices of tourist-like observers and the experiential accounts of tourism professionals, entrepreneurs, and*

public-sector stakeholders embedded in the district, and what practical and theoretical possibilities exist for its future repositioning?

Sub-questions:

- **RQ1.1:** What recurring visual motifs, spatial elements, and symbolic representations characterize the daytime tourism milieu of the Jewish Quarter, as captured by tourism students simulating first-time visitors?
- **RQ1.2:** How do tourism professionals, business operators, and public-sector actors describe the socio-cultural transformations underway in the Jewish Quarter?
- **RQ1.3:** What short and long-term tensions do these stakeholders identify between tourism-led development and the preservation of local community identity, cultural authenticity, and everyday livability?
- **RQ1.4:** What creative or alternative tourism models do these stakeholders view as feasible or desirable for enhancing the district's sustainability, inclusivity, and cultural distinctiveness?

Phase 2: Explanatory - Institutional Reflexivity

RQ2: *How do cultural program directors and staff working in municipally supported institutions in District VII interpret and respond to the challenges and opportunities of managing cultural work in a tourism-saturated urban environment?*

Sub-questions:

- **RQ2.1:** How do these cultural actors currently define their institutional mission and role in shaping urban identity and mitigating tourism-related disruptions within a district dominated by nightlife tourism?
- **RQ2.2:** What operational, financial, bureaucratic, or political constraints are described by cultural institutions as limiting their ability to develop community-focused or participatory tourism initiatives?
- **RQ2.3:** In what ways do these actors describe their cultural programming as a form of placemaking, symbolic mediation, or resistance in response to tourism saturation and civic discontent from local residents?

These questions are designed to generate layered empirical insights that address not only what is happening in the tourism milieu of District VII, but how it is experienced, narrated, and potentially transformed. The study's conceptual model

serves as an interpretive tool for synthesizing these findings and connecting them to broader theoretical debates in tourism studies, urban geography, and cultural planning.

1.5. Conceptual propositioning toward a multi-layered tourism milieu model

This dissertation proposes a conceptual model of the tourism milieu as a theoretical and analytical contribution to tourism studies, urban geography, and cultural planning. Originally introduced by Michalkó and Rátz (2006, 2008), the concept of the tourism milieu encompasses both tangible and intangible elements that co-create the atmosphere and character of a tourism destination. These include architectural features, infrastructure, spatial order, as well as symbolic cues and social practices. According to Michalkó et al. (2022), the tourism milieu emerges from the interplay between material space and individual perception, and operates as a “kaleidoscopic” construct as fluid, multidimensional, and responsive to the co-production of meaning between tourists and locals.

This dissertation contributes to tourism theory by advancing a multi-layered and philosophically grounded model of the tourism milieu that incorporates four interconnected dimensions: ontological situatedness, epistemological framing, phenomenological engagement, and anthropology of place. These layers draw from diverse disciplinary traditions such as human geography, phenomenology, epistemology, and cultural anthropology and are grounded in the empirical realities of Budapest’s District VII, a rapidly transforming nightlife-driven tourism hub. In doing so, this conceptual model addresses longstanding gaps in tourism scholarship, particularly the need for deeper theoretical engagement with the relational, sensory, and symbolic construction of place (Larsen and Johnson, 2012; Malpas, 1999, 2008; Massey, 2005).

The first layer of the model is ontological, emphasizing the relational and processual nature of place. Drawing from Massey’s (2005) theory of spatial multiplicity, this framework rejects static or essentialist understandings of place. Instead, places are constituted through unfolding relations across time, space, and scale. In the context of District VII, different stakeholders such as tourists, residents, entrepreneurs, and institutional actors experience the same physical territory in divergent ways depending on their histories, positionalities, and socio-economic entanglements.

These findings echo Massey's (2005) argument that space is always "under construction," and that place identities are continuously shaped by intersecting trajectories and power-laden interactions.

This ontological insight is further supported by Larsen and Johnson (2012), who argue that the "soul of place" emerges through historical and embodied responsiveness. Malpas (2008) similarly contends that place is not merely a spatial location, but a complex configuration of experience, memory, and embodiment. In the empirical findings, this multiplicity was evident: for some, the district represents economic opportunity and global visibility; for others, it evokes spatial exclusion, detachment, and cultural loss.

The epistemological dimension of the model addresses how tourism places are cognitively and symbolically constructed. Drawing from Kant's (1998) theory of a priori structures of understanding, individuals do not perceive space in a neutral or objective manner, but rather filter it through culturally and cognitively mediated schemas. The photographic analysis conducted in Phase 1 of the research confirms this process. Tourism students acting as simulated first-time visitors produced a highly selective visual grammar of District VII: ruin bars, murals, street food, graffiti, and nostalgic decay. These symbolic elements formed a coherent but partial representation of the district, aligning with Zatori and Smith's (2014) and Pinke-Sziva et al.'s (2019) observations on how ruin bar culture has become an aestheticized tourism commodity.

As Degen and Rose (2012) argue, tourists' spatial imaginaries are shaped not only by what they see but by how they are conditioned to see. Visual framing, emotional priming, and socio-cultural expectation all structure what gets noticed, photographed, and remembered. This epistemological lens reveals how tourism spaces are "known" through discourse, media, policy narratives, and branding efforts that filter and sediment the meanings of place. Such symbolic constructions not only reflect reality but actively shape spatial behavior and emotional response.

The third dimension builds on phenomenology, especially the embodied philosophy of Merleau-Ponty (2012), who emphasizes the pre-reflective, bodily nature of experience. According to Seamon (2015), place is "lived" through sensory engagement, movement, and affect. This layer of the model is especially pertinent to Phase 1 of the dissertation, where participants described the district not only in terms

of visual spectacle but also emotional and atmospheric impressions: overcrowding, sensory saturation, alienation, or curiosity.

These affective modalities align with Butowski's (2023) call for deeper integration of philosophical reasoning into tourism research, particularly with regard to how tourists experience and co-constitute space. While many interviewees in Phase 1 and 2 reported negative emotional responses such as overload or nostalgia, others described positive affective connections, including curiosity, creative stimulation, or a sense of co-presence during cultural interventions. The phenomenological dimension of the tourism milieu thus accommodates both alienation and resonance, dislocation and reattachment that shape the emotional and embodied experience of tourism landscapes.

The fourth and final dimension draws from the anthropology of place (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Hall, 2021), centering on the symbolic labor that sustains cultural meaning, memory, and identity. This was especially salient in Phase 2 of the dissertation, where cultural program directors described their work not just as logistical but curatorial, aimed at preserving continuity, fostering dialogue, and counteracting nightlife-driven homogenization. These actors play a mediating role between past and future, local and global, cultural memory and commodification, thereby constructing the "symbolic infrastructure" of the tourism milieu (Dicks, 2003; Edensor, 1998)

Anthropological insights are critical to understanding how cultural institutions function not only as heritage repositories but as active agents of placemaking (Duxbury, 2021). Their programming reflects ethical labor, cultural resistance, and emotional stewardship. In a context like District VII, which has undergone intense transformation from Jewish district to war ghetto, to post-socialist decline, to nightlife monoculture, the role of symbolic mediation becomes crucial for preserving cultural hybridity and fostering inclusive urban imaginaries (Kovács, 1994; Mérai and Kulikov, 2024; Negussie, 2007).

The illustration of the model showing its elements is represented in Figure 1.

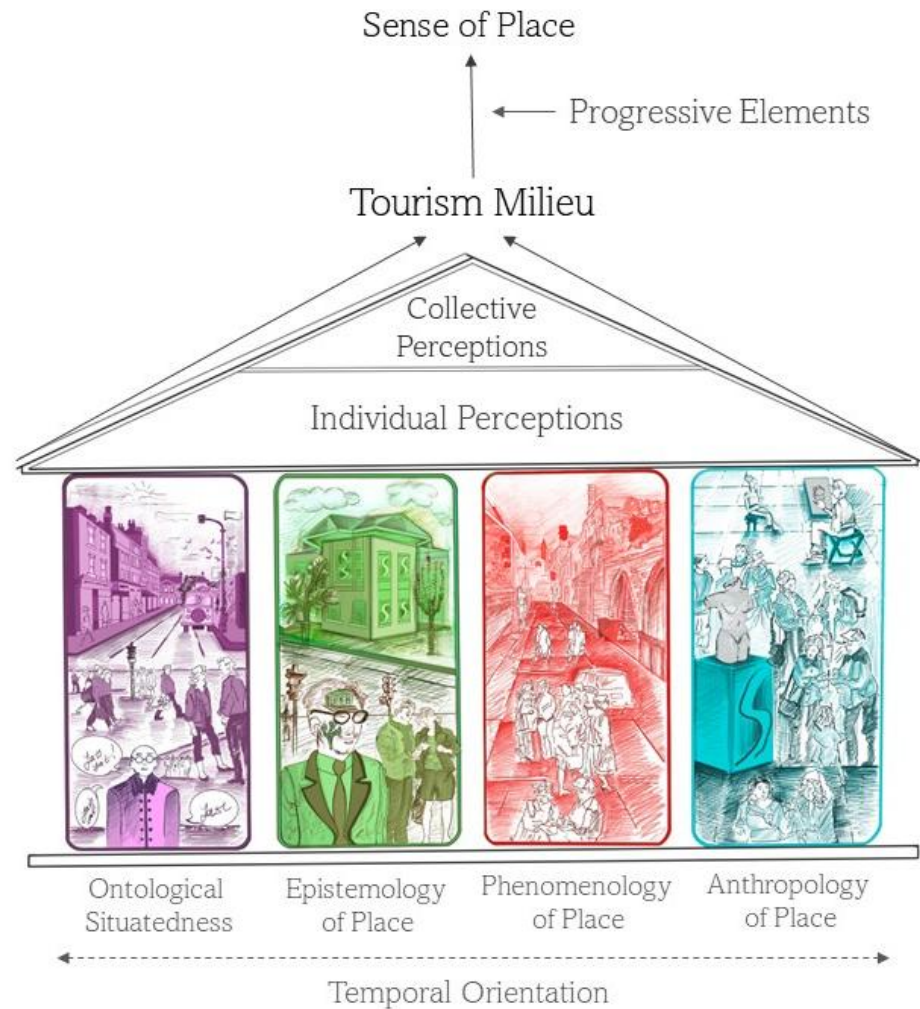


Figure 1: The conceptual framework of the study.
Source: Author's own construction. Graphic Designer: Bal, Zeynep Yagmur.

The tourism milieu merges people's perceptions with destination attributes, leading to a unique sense of place beyond mere formation. This sense reflects a deep emotional connection shaped by individual and collective experiences within the dynamic tourism environment (Lalicic and Garaus, 2022). Ongoing adaptation by integrating progressive elements fosters this connection, meeting both tourist desires and local needs for sustainable community benefit. This approach fosters a strong, shared connection to the destination, emphasising sustainable development and the wellbeing of locals and visitors alike, enriching the place's narrative across time.

This multi-layered model provides both a diagnostic and generative lens for understanding urban tourism dynamics. It reveals how symbolic meaning, emotional

resonance, and institutional labor intersect to shape contested tourism spaces like District VII. At the same time, it proposes a new vocabulary and orientation for tourism theory that moves beyond market-centric paradigms and instead sees tourism as a co-authored social practice.

By foregrounding philosophical depth, affective experience, and cultural agency, the model responds to critiques of overly instrumental tourism planning (Ashworth and Page, 2011; Page and Duignan, 2023), and offers more dialogic, place-sensitive, and reflexive approaches to tourism development. As such, it offers a conceptual lens not only for academic analysis but also for planners, policymakers, and cultural practitioners seeking to navigate tourism futures in ethically and socially sustainable ways.

1.6. Methodological orientation

The methodological orientation of this dissertation is grounded in a qualitative, interpretive, and reflexive framework, informed by philosophical commitments to ontological complexity, epistemological constructivism, phenomenological sensitivity, and anthropological contextualization. This approach is consistent with the study's aim: to explore how the tourism milieu of Budapest's District VII is symbolically constructed, experientially perceived, and institutionally negotiated in a context of urban transformation and tourism saturation.

The research is situated within the interpretivist paradigm, which views knowledge as socially constructed, contextually embedded, and emergent through interaction between the researcher and the researched (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). This philosophical positioning supports an inquiry into tourism not as a neutral or purely economic activity, but as a site of meaning-making, cultural negotiation, and affective tension (Butowski, 2023; Seamon, 2015).

Ontologically, the study draws on relational theories of space (Massey, 2005) and the notion of situated being, wherein place is constituted through shifting spatial, temporal, and social entanglements. The concept of ontological situatedness is essential for understanding how different stakeholders in District VII perceive the same territory differently: some as a cultural asset, others as a site of loss or resistance (Larsen and Johnson, 2012; Malpas, 1999).

Epistemologically, the study is informed by constructivist assumptions, where perception and representation are filtered through cognitive, cultural, and symbolic lenses (Kant, 1998; Zatori and Smith, 2014). This justifies the use of visual and narrative methods to analyze how meaning is co-produced and communicated within the tourism milieu.

A phenomenological lens complements this framework, especially in understanding how space is lived, felt, and sensorially navigated. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty (2012), the study acknowledges the embodied and emotional registers of urban tourism, such as alienation, curiosity, disorientation, or attachment that are not always accessible through language alone but are vital to understanding how tourism is “inhabited” on the ground (Degen and Rose, 2012; Seamon, 2015).

Finally, an anthropological perspective infuses the research with sensitivity to memory, identity, and cultural labor. Inspired by Hall (2021) and the broader tradition of the anthropology of place, this approach allows the research to frame cultural institutions not just as operational actors but as ethical agents that perform symbolic mediation, heritage curation, and narrative repair in response to tourism saturation.

Methodologically, the research follows a multi-phase qualitative design, comprising two interlinked empirical phases:

- **Phase 1** focused on perceptual and symbolic constructions of the tourism milieu, employing:
 - A **visual content analysis** of student-generated photographs simulating first-time tourist perspectives;
 - **Semi-structured interviews** with tourism professionals, entrepreneurs, and public-sector stakeholders embedded in the district.
- **Phase 2** shifted the lens to institutional reflexivity, employing:
 - **In-depth interviews** with cultural program directors and staff working in municipally supported cultural institutions, with a focus on their roles in navigating, mitigating, and reimagining tourism impacts.

Together, these phases enabled an exploration of both individual and collective perceptions, capturing the discursive, affective, and institutional dynamics that co-constitute the tourism milieu.

The data were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis, guided by principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Rather than adhering strictly to procedural coding, the study employed grounded theory as an analytical ethos that privileges emergence, reflexivity, and co-production of meaning over rigid categorization. Thematic coding was iterative and layered, involving cycles of immersion, interpretation, and synthesis across datasets.

The visual content analysis drew from semiotic and sensory methodologies (Pan et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2019), analyzing how student photographs encode atmosphere, identity, and spatial affect. This method provided insight into the symbolic economy of tourism and the discursive construction of urban space.

Interviews were analyzed as situated narratives, offering both descriptive and diagnostic insights into the tensions between tourism-led transformation and cultural continuity. These narratives revealed not only factual accounts but also the emotional and ethical undercurrents of place-based negotiation (Clifford and Marcus, 1986).

Throughout the research process, reflexivity was maintained as a critical stance. Recognizing the researcher's role as a co-producer of knowledge, attention was paid to power asymmetries, emotional responses, and the ethical implications of interpreting participants' lived realities. The study also benefited from insider-outsider dynamics, allowing for both empathetic engagement and analytical distance.

This methodological orientation philosophically coherent, empirically layered, and reflexively grounded ensured that the research could attend to the full complexity of urban tourism dynamics in District VII. It positioned the dissertation not only as a descriptive case study, but as a conceptually generative investigation that contributes to both theoretical advancement and practical transformation in tourism governance.

1.7. Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is structured into ten chapters, each contributing to the progressive development of the research argument from philosophical grounding to empirical inquiry, critical discussion, and theoretical advancement. The chapters are arranged

thematically and methodologically to build a coherent and cumulative investigation of the tourism milieu in Budapest's District VII.

- **Chapter 1: Introduction:** The introductory chapter situates the study within the broader debates on place transformation, urban tourism, and creative placemaking. It outlines the research problem, aims, questions, conceptual framework, and methodological orientation, while identifying key knowledge gaps. This chapter also introduces the philosophical model proposed in the dissertation and sets the tone for a critically reflexive exploration of tourism and urban change.
- **Chapter 2: Philosophical foundations of place:** This chapter elaborates on the ontological, epistemological, phenomenological, and anthropological dimensions of place. Drawing on thinkers such as Massey (2005), Merleau-Ponty (2012), Kant (1998), and Hall (2021), it lays the theoretical groundwork for understanding tourism destinations as dynamic, affective, and symbolically contested milieus.
- **Chapter 3: Tourism milieu:** Building upon the work of Michalkó and Rátz (2006, 2008), this chapter explores the evolution of the tourism milieu concept, including its tangible and intangible layers, affective atmosphere, and the relational construction of tourism space. It further positions the milieu as a dynamic field of perception, experience, and governance.
- **Chapter 4: Sense of place:** Chapter 4 examines the theoretical underpinnings of sense of place, including attachment, identity, and affective belonging. It draws from cultural geography and phenomenology to highlight how residents, tourists, and cultural actors co-construct meaning through spatial encounters and emotional investments.
- **Chapter 5: Creative tourism:** This chapter reviews the literature on creative tourism, from early participatory definitions to more recent interpretations as tools for sustainability and local empowerment. It addresses both opportunities and limitations, setting up the groundwork for the empirical evaluation of creative potential in District VII.
- **Chapter 6: Destination context – Budapest:** This chapter provides a detailed contextual analysis of District VII's urban transformation, overtourism dynamics, the emergence of party tourism, and its socio-cultural

implications. It also introduces the daytime tourism milieu and offers a philosophical lens to analyse interactions within the destination's spatial, symbolic, and experiential dimensions.

- **Chapter 7: Research methodology:** This chapter presents the philosophical and epistemological positioning of the research, anchored in interpretivism and constructivism. It explains the research design, data collection methods, and analytical strategies across two empirical phases.
- **Chapter 8: Research findings:** Organised into two phases, this chapter presents the empirical insights gathered through visual perception and narrative analysis (Phase 1), and institutional reflexivity and cultural actor perspectives (Phase 2). The findings demonstrate the fragmented yet co-constructed nature of the tourism milieu and reveal underlying tensions and progressive potentials.
- **Chapter 9: Discussion:** This chapter revisits and synthesizes the key findings through the lens of the philosophical model, reflecting on themes of situated perception, governance dynamics, creative tourism potentials, and the role of co-creation in transforming the tourism milieu. It argues for a shift from party-centric tourism toward a more culturally grounded and socially inclusive tourism trajectory.
- **Chapter 10: Conclusion:** The concluding chapter offers an integrated synthesis of the research, detailing theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions. It reflects on the key insights, restates the research significance, and outlines limitations and future research directions, positioning the study within the broader field of urban tourism scholarship.

2. PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PLACE

To understand the complexity of tourism milieus, it is essential to begin with the philosophical foundations of place. This chapter establishes the ontological, epistemological, phenomenological, and anthropological dimensions that shape how space is perceived, inhabited, and made meaningful. These perspectives are not merely abstract theories; they provide the conceptual grounding necessary for analysing how tourists engage with places both cognitively and affectively. As the tourism milieu is interpreted in this dissertation through a philosophical lens as well, these foundational views clarify the subjective and intersubjective processes by which meaning is constructed in space.

By exploring how being is situated in space (ontological), how knowledge of place is formed (epistemological), how place is experienced through the body (phenomenological), and how culture encodes spatial meaning (anthropological), this chapter offers a multi-dimensional understanding of place that underpins later discussions. Rather than treating destinations as passive locations, these philosophical insights foreground the lived, sensed, and culturally mediated nature of place, preparing the ground for the analysis of tourism milieus as dynamic and affective environments shaped through human experience.

2.1.Ontological situatedness

The concept of ontological situatedness offers a foundational entry point into understanding how place functions as a condition for being, grounding existence in spatial, temporal, and social coordinates. In order to differentiate the space and place, situatedness should be centred on the spatial, social, and temporal features of place (Marques et al., 2020). Heidegger uses the German term "Dasein" to imply existence in the sense of "it is there" to emphasise situatedness and the involved, in other words, owned nature of that situatedness (Malpas, 2008), which is the precondition for being (Larsen and Johnson, 2012). The subjective and objective experiences of self and others require a specific ontological location (Malpas, 1999, 2008). From an ontological perspective, space comes first, giving rise to the physical and social features blended into place by human interventions. Thereby, place acts as a vital tool for bridging the gap between the natural world and humans, and it may be

applied as a practical, day-to-day guidance for forward-thinking reflection and action (Larsen and Johnson, 2012).

According to the philosophy of ontological situatedness, each subject and object has ontological and functional connections with other entities in their environment, society, and culture (Costello, 2014). Every object in the world has an existence thanks to its edges, which make it visible. Only in relation to some other surface, like a ground or backdrop, a figure can show up. Subjects, objects, words, and ideas stand out as particularly relevant due to the context or circumstance in which they are situated in relation to one another (Larsen and Johnson, 2012). In everyday life, we encounter unique situations that can be crossed over, but it also opens up new possibilities. Thus, to answer the question of place, which is also the question of being, the connection between humans and the wider world needs to be discussed while simultaneously addressing the issue of the nature of the ground (Malpas, 2008).

At its most fundamental level, space can be understood as an infinite realm that is home to everything that "there is." It expresses the primary mode of existence and is closely related to the concept of time, which expresses the infinite duration for which all things are chained by replacing each other in their flux. Relationalism, as advocated by Leibniz, argues that all spatial and temporal links between objects and events are instant and cannot be reduced to spatial and temporal relationships and that all movement is the relational movement of bodies (Evangelidis, 2018). Leibniz's relationalism does not interpret space and time as entities but as the whole of topological interactions between objects and events. On the other hand, space, time, motion, objects, and subjects are tied to each other and cannot exist without one another. One should recognise this fact and that all of these surround each other. Place is the outcome of these linkages while making them possible and known. Hence, the place has ontological and epistemological positions.

Building on the ontological grounding of place, the next section turns to epistemological perspectives that explore how knowledge of place is formed through both innate structures and sensory engagement.

2.2. Epistemology of place

Epistemological inquiries into place address how human beings come to know and interpret the world spatially, integrating sensory data with innate structures of understanding. Kant's idea of space and time comes from addressing the questions of how we know and what we know. Even though it differs from most philosophers' ideas, Kant gives a clear example of how epistemology and metaphysics are tied together. Kant's answer to the argument is that we can possess a priori knowledge of space and time because they represent pure forms of every intuition provided by our own capacity for perception (Kant, 1998). Seth (1893) dwells upon Kant's epistemology, which states that experience is differentiated from simple sensation by a number of factors. Kant believes, and he is correct in this belief, that there is no way that knowledge could ever originate only from the particular impulses of passive senses. These sensations, if they do, in fact, exist, cannot be known; in order for them to be considered components of knowledge, the mind must first actively seize and then logically interpret them. In addition to the stimulation of the senses, knowledge necessitates the existence of a core of fundamental judgments. These judgments entail the fundamental category of causes and, eventually, the entirety of the rational framework (Seth, 1893).

Rahmanita (2018) argues that the beauty of a place is the source of enjoyment; in other words, pleasure and beauty are inseparable. A person's faculty of mind includes the capacity to experience pleasure. Taking pleasure in beauty is a free way to use one's imagination and comprehension or broad cognition. Due to the interaction of sensation with reason and knowledge, aesthetics develops into a philosophical field of study, and this interaction serves as the aesthetics' formative experience. Rahmanita (2018) further elaborates on Kant's philosophy that pleasure is a mental condition in which a representation is in harmony with itself as a foundation, either solely for the preservation of this state or for the production of its aim as the sensory representation of the beauty of an object. When one sees the surroundings, it is his/her own free playground actually to realise the place and perceptively experience it. The understanding of place is constructed based on different kinds of perceptual experiences in which one might have a causal interaction with the broader world by employing his/her senses and different methods that have a distinct conscious and phenomenological extension (Hill, 2022)..

2.3. Phenomenology of place

Phenomenology shifts attention to lived experience, focusing on how place is perceived through the body and consciousness as an unfolding process of engagement and meaning-making. In the 20th century, Cartesian philosophy's tangible experience of space has been questioned and debated. With the development of phenomenological theory, the Cartesian view of space, which was dominant from Descartes until the second half of the 20th century, was abandoned, and philosophers examined the multidimensional understanding of place (Smith, 2018). Although Edmund Husserl defined phenomenology as a new way of thinking, the term phenomenology was first used in the 18th century in the works of Lambert, Herder, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel (Shirazi, 2009). However, Edmund Husserl's conception of phenomenology as a philosophical approach is widely accepted today. As defined by Husserl, phenomenology is an inquiry into how the subject perceives and forms the world during a movement of consciousness (Moran, 2002). Spiegelberg (1994) claims that no specific teaching method may lead to a conclusive response to the question of what phenomenology is. Phenomenology is a broad and interdisciplinary field of study that studies human experience (Moran, 2002). In Husserl's theory of phenomenology, consciousness is the factor that makes disclosing and seeing possible. According to Heidegger, the subject concept is best understood as an ongoing practice or praxis that is always situated in reference to the existence of other beings (Heidegger, 1996). Heidegger emphasises that place is not a form filled by objects and subjects but rather reveals unity as a way of being and that the human body and space cannot be conceived separately from one another (Duvisac, 2014).

The unity of the subject and object connection is central to the phenomenological account of how one perceives the place. As a result, the place concept investigated by phenomenology can only exist within the context of a network of interdependent connections situated in place. In line with these philosophical perspectives, Merleau-Ponty's (2012) key insight challenges traditional dualities and highlights the connection between perception and the body. It is not just a mental process; the body is not just another object in the world. Traditional categories like inner/outer, mental/physical, and subjective/objective cannot adequately describe perception. Instead, it is a complex interplay of intention, the body's senses and movements, and it defies simple categorisation into traditional dualities (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). This

challenges the Cartesian separation of mind and body and offers a more nuanced understanding of human perception.

One of the most evident characteristics of phenomenal transparency, when applied to the place concept, is that space, time, motion, objects, and subjects in the place occupy discrete positions yet melt into the totality, giving birth to a variety of interpretations and perceptual experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). This feature contributes to the dynamic nature of place by providing an unlimited number of perspectives while, at the same time, offering a tourism milieu depending on the being's ontological situatedness and epistemological understanding. Merleau-Ponty (2012) asserts that perception cannot be separated from its contextual relevance. Perception is a behaviour. Behaviour constitutes a whole that cannot be broken into its individual components; it cannot be reduced to the mechanical process that takes place between action and reaction. How one understands a place is essentially determined by the meaning it has for him/her. Accordingly, the totality is always recognised before the pieces. The holistic meaning is already there before the sensations. Merleau-Ponty (2012) refers to this comprehensive concept as the perceptual horizon.

The phenomenological method deconstructs place, and this leads to an increase in the number of questions concerning place's historicity, origin, and how societies of the past have perceived it. According to a phenomenological interpretation, place is in a state of ongoing flux and transformation. The place is analogous to an organisation in the sense that it is always moving along with the phenomena that are articulated to it. The main source of this movement is the experiences of the humans. According to Lefebvre, space is a product of society (Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre questioned the Cartesian conception of place by arguing that place is not static and constant but rather something dynamic and in flux. If the place is constructed and a productive process exists, then the historicity of the place should be elaborated. Lefebvre further argues that contrary to popular belief, the history of place does not follow the same causal chain as 'historical' (i.e. dated) events, nor does it follow the same sequence of laws, values, ideologies, and social and economic structures and institutions, teleological or not (superstructures). There is little doubt, however, that the relations of production, as well as the forces of production, all play a role in the creation of physical space (Lefebvre, 1991). In accordance with Castells (1983), an

ontological interpretation of sociality and historicity is necessary to comprehend the place, and that place is not only a mirror of society but society itself.

Having examined how place is ontologically grounded, epistemologically constructed, and phenomenologically experienced, the next step is to consider how place acquires meaning within collective and cultural contexts. The anthropological lens adds a vital dimension to this inquiry by revealing how place is shaped through symbolic systems, social memory, and cultural expression.

2.4. Anthropology of place

Ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological grounds underpin philosophical anthropology. Anthropologically, the place provides a space with meaning, character, and a tie to culture or identity. It is the meaning and vibe that humans attach to a particular place. Human identities and cultural origins permeate the place. In continuous encoding with humans, place makes itself readable through semiotics. With the help of these encodings, the place acquires the capability of portraying itself through the cultural units seen in terms of their role in constructing semantic domains (Randviir, 2020). A societal construct of place indicates that the physical environment is the product of culture and a particular social moment that moulds the humans who construct it as a collective thinking both in the present and throughout history; furthermore, the meanings that are connected to the physical space are also produced via social interaction and culture (Vigiola, 2022). In order to find meaning of place that is interconnected and fluid, it may be necessary to recognise the distinctive juxtaposition and adaption of the cultural elements that create places and give them their individuality (Harrington, 2004). Hall (2021) states the place and its implications do not retain hegemonic power. The place is constantly influenced by the interplay of history, culture, political power and time. Cultural identity originates from a place with history and belongs to both the past and the future. It is subject to continuous change, just like anything else that has a historical context. The meaning of a place, then, is a mode of production. It comprises a journey that is never finished and continues to expand its scope to incorporate new meanings that are additional or supplemental (Hall, 2021).

Together, these philosophical perspectives present place not as a fixed or neutral container of activity, but as a dynamic field constituted through being, knowing, experiencing, and symbolising. This foundational understanding highlights the

complexity of spatial meaning-making and prepares the ground for the next chapter's shift toward the concept of the *milieu*. By engaging with the philosophical dimensions of place, the dissertation is positioned to explore how spatial environments become affectively charged, socially encoded, and experientially lived.

3. TOURISM MILIEU

The concept of the tourism milieu provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how destinations are produced, perceived, and lived through the interaction of people, place, and meaning. The ontological, epistemological, phenomenological, and anthropological perspectives explored in the previous chapter were necessary to establish the philosophical foundations of space and place. These perspectives illuminate how human experience, perception, and knowledge are situated within environments, thus enabling a deeper interrogation of how meaning is constructed in tourism settings. They also highlight the importance of embodied and relational modes of understanding space offering important insights for interpreting how tourists engage with destinations not merely as physical sites, but as emotionally and symbolically charged environments. In this chapter, the concept of the tourism milieu is interpreted through sociological and anthropological perspectives, and also through philosophical frameworks that highlight the experiential, existential, and embodied dimensions of tourism space. By drawing from sociology, anthropology, phenomenology, and tourism studies, the chapter develops a multi-layered account of how place is co-created and experienced. It unfolds through three interrelated sections: a historical and theoretical overview of the milieu concept (3.1), an analysis of embodied experience (3.2), and an examination of cultural dynamics and power (3.3).

3.1. Evolving concept of the tourism milieu

The concept of *milieu* has gained increasing attention in tourism studies as a way to understand how destinations are produced, experienced, and transformed through the interaction of people, space, and meaning. While often associated with physical or spatial settings, *milieu* is a concept with deep sociological, geographical, and anthropological roots. Tracing its theoretical development provides a critical foundation for understanding how tourism environments function as more than mere locations. This section begins by outlining foundational interpretations of *milieu* in social theory, before moving toward its adaptation and application within tourism research.

The term *milieu* has long been used across sociology, geography, and anthropology to describe the dynamic relationship between individuals and their environments.

Rather than serving as a static backdrop, *milieu* functions as a socially and symbolically charged space in which behaviour, meaning, and perception are continuously produced and negotiated. This conceptual lens is particularly relevant for understanding tourism milieus, where space is experienced not only physically but through layers of norms, expectations, and cultural signification. In classical sociology, Émile Durkheim (1982) identified the *milieu social* as the normative environment that conditions individual behaviour through collective beliefs and shared values. In the context of tourism, this concept provides insight into how unspoken rules and behavioural expectations shape tourist conduct and host–guest interaction. Gabriel Tarde (1903) emphasized social imitation as a driving force in the spread of behaviours and preferences, which helps explain how tourism trends and place reputations circulate within and across urban environments. Robert Park (1915) developed the idea of urban milieu within his ecological model of the city. His work offers a useful foundation for interpreting tourism districts as adaptive social environments shaped by spatial organisation, flows of people, and layered uses over time.

Later theorists extended the concept of *milieu* to explore how space is not only inhabited but socially constructed and subtly regulated. Arnold Gehlen (1988) argued that humans require structured environments for orientation, particularly when navigating unfamiliar or complex social situations. This insight directly applies to tourism, where destinations provide interpretive frameworks through physical design, signage, sensory cues, and curated imagery. Norbert Elias (1978, 2000) proposed the idea of figuration, in which individuals exist within evolving networks of interdependent relationships. In tourism milieus, the roles of residents, tourists, entrepreneurs, and institutions are constantly shifting and co-constitutive. Michel Foucault (2007) reconceptualised *milieu* within the framework of biopolitics, describing it as a field of spatial governance where power operates through the modulation of environments. In tourism studies, this perspective enables an analysis of how urban space is shaped through soft mechanisms such as pedestrianisation, lighting schemes, or crowd flow management that influence behaviour without direct intervention.

Affective and symbolic interpretations of *milieu* further contribute to understanding the tourism experience. Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, 1977) introduced the concept of

topophilia, highlighting how space becomes meaningful through sensory engagement, memory, and emotional attachment. His work is especially relevant to the analysis of how tourists form bonds with specific neighbourhoods, atmospheres, or aesthetics. Clifford Geertz (1973), in the field of symbolic anthropology, argued that human environments are interpreted through culturally constructed webs of meaning. Destinations, from this perspective, are not merely landscapes or infrastructures but culturally performed and symbolically saturated spaces. These theoretical contributions provide an essential conceptual foundation for analysing the tourism milieu as a site of social practice, emotional investment, and spatial transformation.

These conceptualisations of *milieu* as emotionally and symbolically mediated spaces lay the groundwork for more applied interpretations within tourism research. Building on this theoretical foundation, recent tourism scholarship has adapted the notion of *milieu* to analyse how destinations are experienced, co-produced, and understood by tourists and local communities alike.

The concept of the tourism milieu represents a sophisticated and multi-layered perspective in tourism studies, offering a nuanced understanding of tourist destinations that goes beyond traditional metrics (Michalkó et al., 2022). It signifies a shift from viewing destinations merely as physical locations to understanding them as dynamic spaces imbued with personal and collective experiences. The tourism milieu encompasses a range of elements, from tangible to intangible and from physical settings to emotional resonances (Michalkó and Rátz, 2008). The term "milieu" is challenging to define due to its complex and ambiguous nature, a complexity driven by the cognitive intricacies involved in shaping the milieu experience (Michalkó and Rátz, 2006). It encompasses humans' sociocultural and geographic environments intertwined with their subjective interpretations (Michalkó and Rátz, 2008). The subjective dimension of the milieu is a pivotal and distinguishing feature, as individuals consciously experience environmental dynamics through their own inner filters. As per the most current and widely accepted spatial definition, the tourism milieu is the setting in which individuals live, which, in turn, influences their attitudes (Michalkó and Rátz, 2006).

The formation of the tourism milieu is a dynamic process deeply rooted in the interplay between individual perceptions and collective experiences. It emerges from

the gradual objectification of visitors' psychological perceptions, transforming personal impressions, sentiments, and subjective interpretations into a nearly homogeneous factual reflection of a destination (Michalkó and Rátz, 2006). On one hand, this sphere consists of elements, motion, and subjects. At the same time, it includes historicity, sociality, and culture, all impacting human perceptions and attitudes towards places (Michalkó and Rátz, 2008). Viewing the milieu as a network of interrelationships, humans respond individually or collectively, both of which continuously shape the phenomenal sphere. However, one must also consider that the milieu is embedded within the context of a destination and is detachable from physical space (Michalkó and Rátz, 2008).

Immanuel Kant's epistemological insights offer a profound foundation for analyzing the tourism milieu, intertwining the concepts of innate knowledge (*a priori*) and experiential learning (*a posteriori*) to elucidate how tourist destinations are comprehended and experienced. Kant asserts that our comprehension of space and time is built on *a priori* intuitions, which serve as the fundamental structures through which we perceive the world (Kant, 1998). Kant's focus on *a priori* knowledge helps explain how tourists' pre-existing cognitive frameworks influence their perceptions of a destination's physical and cultural landscape, contributing to a collective understanding of the place. However, each tourist's unique, lived experiences are shaped by direct, *a posteriori* knowledge gained through engagement with the destination, which adds a layer of complexity and dynamism to this collective understanding (Michalkó and Rátz, 2008).

Kant's transcendental idealism further addresses the subjective nature of human experience. It indicates that tourists' interactions with the tourism milieu are deeply influenced by their personal cognitive frameworks, which are informed by both *a priori* intuitions and *a posteriori* experiences. This blend of subjective and objective elements means that the formation and evolution of the tourism milieu are intrinsically linked to the dynamic interplay between individual perceptions, collective experiences, and the tangible elements of the destination (Michalkó and Rátz, 2006).

Kant's delineation of knowledge as an interaction between sensation (*a posteriori* knowledge gained through experience) and reason (*a priori* knowledge) mirrors how the tourism milieu is shaped. This process involves a continuous exchange between

the sensory inputs provided by the destination (the supply-side elements) and the interpretative experiences of tourists, thereby reinforcing the living, ever-evolving nature of the tourism milieu. Just as knowledge is not a static entity but evolves through ongoing interactions, the tourism milieu, too, is a vibrant, changing construct, continually influenced by the current experiences, perceptions, and cultural trends of tourists.

The philosophy of ontological situatedness resonates with Kant's perspective. Kant believed that knowledge necessitates the existence of fundamental judgments and emphasized that sensations must be actively seized and logically interpreted (Kant, 1998). This alignment highlights that tourists' perceptions and experiences in the tourism milieu are not passive but actively shaped by their encounters with supply-side elements. Kant's emphasis on the role of fundamental judgments mirrors the importance of individual perceptions in the formation of the tourism milieu.

The supply-side elements of a destination play a fundamental role in shaping the tourism milieu. These elements encompass various physical and virtual components that collectively contribute to the overall experience of a destination. According to Michalkó and Rátz (2008), the tourism milieu is not solely a product of tourists' perceptions; it is significantly influenced by supply-side elements such as landscape, climate, historical context, flavours, noises, smells, visibility, language, clothing, religion, perceived safety, price level, traffic culture, public hygiene, host-guest relationship, dissonance, and social interactions. These elements shown in Figure 2 provide the tangible framework within which tourists' experiences and perceptions are formed and evolved.

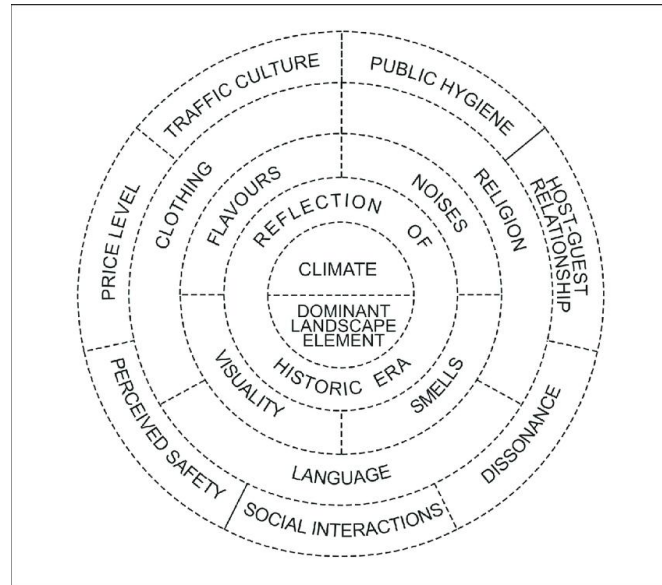


Figure 2: The kaleidoscopic structure of the tourist milieu.
Source: Michalkó and Rátz, 2006, pp. 100.

Ontological situatedness refers to the essence of being situated within a specific destination (Malpas, 1999, 2008). It emphasizes that this situation is not static but continually evolves as tourists encounter and create constantly changing unique situations (Malpas, 2008). The supply-side elements thus directly impact the way tourists perceive and interact with a destination, influencing their sense of being and connection to the place. From an ontological perspective, space is the precursor to the emergence of place, embodying both the physical and social characteristics that human interventions blend into a coherent whole (Larsen and Johnson, 2012). This foundational view posits place as a crucial mediator between the natural world and humans, offering a framework for reflection and action that highlights the significance of our daily interactions with our surroundings (Hill, 2022). Such an understanding is significant for tourism, as it suggests that destinations are not static but are continuously shaped by human engagement, thereby influencing the tourism milieu through a collective embodiment of these interactions.

While philosophical and perceptual approaches highlight how individuals construct meaning through space, it is equally important to consider how social structures shape those meanings. A sociological perspective reveals that spatial preferences and aesthetic experiences are not only personal but deeply conditioned by broader systems of class, education, and cultural capital. Among the sociological theorists who have addressed the relationship between space, taste, and social structure, Pierre Bourdieu offers one of the most influential and empirically grounded frameworks.

The groundwork for Bourdieu's later theory of taste and distinction was laid in his earlier collaborative work with Jean-Claude Passeron, particularly in *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1990). In this study, Bourdieu and Passeron examine how cultural knowledge and interpretive skills are transmitted through socially structured environments such as the family and the education system. They argue that individuals' ability to recognise and engage with legitimate cultural forms is shaped not only by schooling, but by the broader social context into which they are born. Although their use of the term *milieu* is conceptually flexible, it points to the social space in which dispositions are formed and validated. This early framework reinforces the idea that individual perceptions of space including aesthetic and experiential responses to tourism environments are shaped through social and cultural conditioning, rather than emerging from purely individual or spontaneous judgement.

Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* and cultural distinction provides a valuable lens for understanding how individuals perceive and experience tourism milieus. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), he argues that tastes, preferences, and aesthetic judgments are not neutral or individually derived but are structured by social class and formed through lifelong socialisation. The concept of *habitus* describes the internalised dispositions that guide how individuals interpret and interact with the world. These dispositions are shaped by early experiences within particular social environments and determine what is perceived as desirable, legitimate, or valuable. In this sense, the tourism milieu can be seen not only as a physical space but also as a socially encoded field of meaning, where symbolic distinctions are reproduced through the consumption of place.

Within this framework, the choices tourists make, whether in cultural participation, spatial orientation, or sensory engagement, are shaped by the embodied history of their social position. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu illustrates how members of dominant classes tend to prefer abstract, formal, and symbolic expressions of culture, while dominated classes are more oriented toward practical, emotional, and accessible forms (1984). These preferences are not simply aesthetic but reflect different relations to necessity and autonomy. When applied to urban tourism, this perspective allows us to interpret the tourism milieu as a space of differentiated appeal, where individuals are drawn to particular atmospheres and experiences that align with their

socialised dispositions. Rather than viewing tourists as free agents selecting experiences at will, Bourdieu's theory highlights how symbolic structures shape both the perception of place and the practices enacted within it.

While Bourdieu provides a structural understanding of how tastes and preferences are socially conditioned, C. Wright Mills offers an equally important perspective on how individual experience is shaped by the interplay between personal biography and broader historical forces.

In *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), Mills draws a distinction between *milieu* which is the immediate social and spatial context of a person's life and *structure*, which refers to larger institutional and historical systems. He argues that individuals tend to interpret their situations within the frame of their immediate milieu, often without recognising the influence of broader social forces on their experiences (Mills, 1959). This distinction is especially relevant for the tourism milieu, where what appears to be a personal or aesthetic encounter is in fact shaped by larger dynamics, such as urban transformation, policy decisions, and global tourism flows. When applied to tourism, Mills' framework draws attention to the way destinations are experienced through both personal engagement and systemic conditions. Tourists may form emotional connections with a place, yet these are always mediated by the historical narratives, economic arrangements, and cultural structures embedded in the destination. In this light, the tourism milieu is a site where individual experience becomes entangled with broader public issues. Mills' approach helps reframe tourism not just as a matter of leisure or choice, but as a context where identity, memory, and spatial practice are socially embedded and historically situated.

Building on this, the cultural sociology of Gerhard Schulze offers a complementary understanding of how these structurally mediated experiences are increasingly shaped by the pursuit of emotionally and aesthetically rich encounters in contemporary society.

In *The Experience Society* (2008), Schulze argues that in post-industrial societies, the pursuit of emotionally fulfilling, aesthetically rich experiences has become a dominant organising principle of everyday life. This shift marks a departure from earlier forms of life shaped by survival or duty, moving toward an orientation structured by what he terms *experience rationality* (Schulze, 2008). Here, individuals organise leisure, consumption, and even self-expression around the goal

of subjective enrichment. Spaces, including tourism destinations, are evaluated not just for what they are, but for how they feel and what they offer emotionally and atmospherically.

Central to Schulze's work is the concept of "aesthetic milieus" which is social groupings based not only on class or income but on shared aesthetic preferences and expectations of experience (Schulze, 2008). These milieus influence how people engage with space, what they find attractive or authentic, and what kind of environments they seek out. In the context of tourism, this perspective helps explain the rising importance of atmosphere, mood, and symbolic value over fixed attractions or monumentality. The tourism milieu becomes a site of self-curation and affective alignment, where individuals pursue spaces that resonate with their lifestyle orientation and aesthetic sensibility. Schulze's theory thus reinforces the view that tourism is increasingly about emotional co-creation within culturally coded environments.

While Schulze highlights the cultural logic that motivates the pursuit of aesthetic experiences, a further layer of understanding is offered by phenomenological approaches that examine how these experiences are lived and embodied. The next section turns to the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose philosophy of perception provides a foundation for exploring how the tourism milieu is encountered through the body and senses.

3.2. Embodied experience in the tourism milieu

This section discusses the concept of the tourism milieu through the philosophical lens of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as presented in his seminal work in the 20th-century philosophy, "Phenomenology of Perception" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). Merleau-Ponty's exploration of embodied human experience and the fundamental role of perception offers profound insights into the dynamic interactions within tourist locales, emphasizing the co-creation of experiences that define destinations. This perspective sheds light on the deep connection between tourists' physical embodiment and the essence of the places they visit, enhancing our understanding of tourism as an integrated, experiential phenomenon.

The understanding of place within the context of the tourism milieu is constructed based on different kinds of perceptual experiences in which one might have a causal

interaction with the broader world by employing his/her senses and different methods that have a distinct conscious and phenomenological extension (Hill, 2022). Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological insights profoundly extend our understanding of the tourism milieu, moving beyond the conventional view of tourist spaces as static physical locations. His philosophy suggests that these spaces are dynamic, lived environments co-created through the embodied interactions between tourists and their surroundings (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). This embodied interaction is not a mere backdrop to the tourist experience but a vibrant, integral part of it, shaping and being shaped by the individual's perceptions, movements, and engagements. The active role of perception in Merleau-Ponty's theory challenges us to see the tourism milieu as a fluid, evolving space where physical and intangible elements intertwine. A destination's landscape, cultural heritage, and social atmosphere are not just passively consumed but actively experienced through a bodily engagement that imbues them with personal and collective meaning. This approach invites a reevaluation of how destinations are designed and marketed, emphasizing the need to cater to the multisensory, embodied nature of tourist experiences.

Further elaborating on the implications of Merleau-Ponty's rejection of Cartesian dualism, his philosophy illuminates the complex relationship between the mind and body in the context of tourism. The embodied nature of perception means that tourist experiences are deeply rooted in the physical, sensorial engagement with the environment. This perspective compels us to consider tourist spaces' tactile, olfactory, auditory, and visual dimensions as central components of the milieu rather than mere adjuncts to the visual appeal. By emphasizing the unity of sensory experiences and cognitive processes, Merleau-Ponty's insights challenge us to create tourism environments that engage the whole body, fostering a deeper, more immersive interaction with the destination. This holistic view of tourist engagement highlights the significance of designing tourism spaces that facilitate a rich, embodied interaction, ensuring that destinations offer not just sights to see but worlds to be lived and felt, thereby enriching the fabric of the tourism milieu.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'being in the world' adds a profound existential layer to tourism analysis, emphasizing how individuals are deeply entwined with the places they visit. This interconnectedness suggests that tourists are active agents in the life of a destination, their presence and actions contributing to its perpetual

evolution. The dynamic relationship between tourists and the tourism milieu is inherently co-creative; tourists' perceptions and engagements bring destinations to life, infusing them with new meanings and experiences. This view challenges the notion of static tourist sites, proposing instead that destinations are living entities, constantly reshaped by the myriad interactions with their visitors. This perspective enriches our understanding of tourism as a mutual exchange, where both tourists and destinations are transformed through their encounters, highlighting the significance of designing tourism experiences that foster this deeply interactive and transformative relationship.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of intercorporeality significantly deepens the understanding of the tourism milieu by highlighting how perceptions and experiences within tourist destinations are deeply communal and shared, transcending individual experiences. This mutual intertwining of the perceiver and the perceived suggests that destinations become sites of collective meaning-making, blending the social and material worlds in a rich repository of cultural and personal narratives. Such an intersubjective field showcases the diversity of interactions and interpretations that individuals and communities bring to and draw from their environments, emphasizing the role of destinations as spaces where cultural, historical, and personal dimensions converge and coalesce.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, emphasizing the embodied nature of perception and the intertwining of subject and world, brings various insights to various fields, including tourism studies. Beyond what has been discussed, Merleau-Ponty's exploration of the pre-reflective, bodily engagement with the world offers a deeper understanding of non-verbal communication, spatial navigation, and the aesthetics of experience, all of which are crucial in the context of tourism. His work suggests that our most fundamental way of being in the world, how we move, perceive, and relate to our surroundings and others, shapes our experiences profoundly. This has implications for designing tourism experiences that are accessible, engaging, and meaningful on a sensory and emotional level, emphasizing the importance of creating spaces that resonate with the embodied nature of human experience. Additionally, Merleau-Ponty's ideas on the fluidity of perception and the dynamic, ever-changing nature of our engagement with places can inspire innovative approaches to heritage preservation, sustainable tourism, and community

involvement, ensuring that tourism development enhances rather than detracts from the authenticity and vibrancy of destinations.

3.3. Cultural dynamics in the tourism milieu

Ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological grounds underpin philosophical anthropology. Anthropologically, within the context of the tourism milieu, the place provides physicality and profound space for meaning, character, and a connection to culture or identity. The rich meaning and unique vibes that humans attach to a particular place shape the tourism milieu. Humans' identities and cultural origins become intertwined with the place, creating a complex interplay between the human experience and the destination. In a continuous encoding process through interactions with tourists, the place communicates its essence through semiotics, revealing its cultural significance. With the help of these encoded messages, the tourism milieu gains the capability to portray itself through the cultural elements that construct its semantic domains (Randviir, 2020).

Adapting from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, the tourism milieu, shaped by the interplay of history, culture, and societal constructs, becomes a space where these complex human narratives unfold. Tourist spaces are not static; they are dynamic, living entities co-created through the embodied interactions between tourists and their surroundings. A destination's heritage and cultural identity intertwine with tourists' perceptions, adding layers of meaning and significance to the experience.

A societal construct of the place indicates that the physical environment is the product of culture and a particular social moment that moulds the humans who construct it as collective thinking both in the present and throughout history; furthermore, the meanings that are connected to the physical space are also produced via social interaction and culture (Vigiola, 2022). In the context of tourism, this construct comes to life as tourists engage with the destination's cultural and historical elements. The place becomes a space where history, culture, and personal experiences merge to create a rich repository of meaning. This interplay of recognition and selection also reflects broader aesthetic milieus (Schulze, 2008), through which individuals seek cultural experiences aligned with their lifestyle values and sensory preferences.

These cultural meanings, however, are not distributed evenly or interpreted uniformly. As Bourdieu (1984) argues, cultural fields are arenas of symbolic power, where legitimacy is continuously negotiated through social distinctions. In tourism, this means that what is considered “authentic,” “valuable,” or “culturally rich” is often filtered through dominant aesthetic norms, influenced by classed and institutionalized perceptions. The tourism milieu, then, becomes a contested space where not only cultural heritage but also cultural authority is performed and reproduced.

In order to find meaning of place that is interconnected and fluid, it may be necessary to recognize the distinctive juxtaposition and adaption of the cultural elements that create places and give them their individuality (Harrington, 2004). As active agents in the tourism milieu, tourists play a pivotal role in this process. Their perceptions, interactions, and interpretations contribute to the ongoing evolution of the destination. The tourism milieu is not a passive backdrop but a dynamic space where culture and identity are constantly negotiated and redefined.

Hall (2021) states the place and its implications do not retain hegemonic power. The interplay of history, culture, political power, and time constantly influences the place. Cultural identity originates from a place with history and belongs to both the past and the future. It is subject to continuous change, just like anything else that has a historical context. The meaning of a place, then, is a mode of production. It comprises a journey that is never finished and continues to expand its scope to incorporate new meanings that are additional or supplemental (Hall, 2021).

4. SENSE OF PLACE

The comprehensive exploration of the tourism milieu, as elaborated in the previous chapter, naturally transitions to the concept of sense of place. Sense of place emerges as a critical construct that encapsulates the emotional, cognitive, and social ties that individuals form with destinations (Tuan, 1977). The complexity and richness of sense of place can be fully appreciated through the lens of the tourism milieu. This concept serves not merely as a static attribute of a destination but as a dynamic outcome of the interactions, experiences, and cultural engagements facilitated by the tourism milieu.

4.1. Introduction to sense of place

The "sense of place" concept is a critical construct within interdisciplinary fields, bridging geography, environmental psychology, sociology, urban planning and tourism, used to describe the depth of human attachment to and perception of geographic settings. It refers to the emotional, cognitive, and symbolic connections individuals develop with particular environments (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976; Cresswell, 2004). These connections are shaped through lived experience, memory, cultural meaning, and social practices, making the term both affective and ideational in nature.

Historically, the emergence of the concept is closely tied to reactions against the perceived placelessness and alienation brought on by modernity, urbanisation, and globalisation. Seminal geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph were among the first to articulate a framework for understanding this loss and reinvention of spatial meaning. Tuan's *Topophilia* (1974) and *Space and Place* (1977) introduced the idea that places gain meaning through human perception and emotional experience. He argued that spatial attachment stems from sensual and existential encounters with the environment. Similarly, Relph's *Place and Placelessness* (1976) explored the erosion of unique place identities due to homogenising architectural and planning practices, arguing for the authenticity of place experience as central to human geography.

By the 1980s, the concept was further developed in environmental psychology, particularly through the notion of *place identity*, introduced by Proshansky et al. (1983). Their work framed place not merely as a backdrop to human activity but as

integral to self-identity, shaped through cognitive and affective associations with the environment. This marked an important theoretical turn: from viewing place as fixed and external to recognising it as internalised and dynamic.

In urban studies and planning, Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (1960) had already laid a foundation for understanding how people navigate and mentally map urban environments, emphasising the visual and structural qualities that make places legible and memorable. His concept of "imageability" brought attention to the role of design in cultivating meaningful environments (Lynch, 1960).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the theoretical landscape broadened further through cultural geography and phenomenology. Scholars such as Tim Cresswell (2004) and Doreen Massey (1994) began to challenge essentialist or static views of place, arguing for more fluid and relational understandings. Massey (1994) introduced the idea of place as a meeting point of multiple trajectories, socially constructed and constantly in flux. This emphasis on plurality, power, and narrative complexity brought new depth to the concept of sense of place.

Additionally, Stedman's (2002) contribution from environmental psychology highlighted the symbolic meanings of place, tying place attachment and satisfaction to individual and collective interpretations of landscape. His empirical work showed how symbolic and affective associations predict attitudes toward conservation and development, extending the concept's relevance into environmental behaviour and planning (Stedman, 2002).

Throughout its development, "sense of place" has become an essential construct across disciplines including geography, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and tourism studies. It now represents not only personal ties to locations but also the broader cultural, political, and ecological forces that mediate those ties (Lewicka, 2011; Manzo and Devine-Wright, 2013).

Table 1 offers a chronological overview of key milestones and conceptual shifts in the development of the sense of place, serving as a bridge to its application within tourism studies.

Table 1: Chronological overview of key milestones and conceptual shifts in the development of the sense of place.

Year	Author(s)	Milestone / Contribution	Discipline
1960	Kevin Lynch	Introduced <i>imageability</i> in <i>The Image of the City</i> ; emphasized mental maps and visual legibility	Urban Planning, Environmental Psychology
1974	Yi-Fu Tuan	Coined <i>topophilia</i> (affective bond with place) in <i>Topophilia</i>	Humanistic Geography
1976	Edward Relph	Published <i>Place and Placelessness</i> ; introduced existential insideness and placelessness	Humanistic Geography
1977	Yi-Fu Tuan	Published <i>Space and Place</i> ; defined sense of place as shaped by experience and perception	Humanistic Geography
1981	Stokols and Shumaker	Developed the concept of <i>place dependence</i> as a functional relationship	Environmental Psychology
1983	Proshansky et al.	Introduced <i>place identity</i> as a component of self-identity	Environmental Psychology
1989	Nelson Graburn	Described tourism as a ritual process reinforcing cultural identity	Anthropology
1994	Doreen Massey	Proposed a relational and progressive concept of place as open, contested, and dynamic	Cultural Geography

Year	Author(s)	Milestone / Contribution	Discipline
1996	Twigger-Ross and Uzzell	Identified psychological processes (distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem, self-efficacy) in place identity	Environmental Psychology
2001	Jorgensen and Stedman	Developed a multidimensional model: place attachment, identity, and dependence	Environmental Psychology, Tourism
2002	Stedman	Empirically studied symbolic meanings of place and their links to environmental behaviour	Environmental Psychology
2004	Cresswell; Jamal and Hill	Cresswell emphasized place as socially constructed; Jamal and Hill linked sense of place to authenticity discourses in tourism	Cultural Geography, Tourism
2005	Kyle et al.	Developed two-dimensional model of place attachment: identity and dependence	Tourism Studies
2006	Manzo and Perkins	Explored community planning and belonging as part of sense of place	Sociology, Community Psychology
2010	Devine-Wright and Clayton	Explored conflicts between imposed representations and local place identities	Environmental Psychology
2011	Lewicka	Published extensive review of place attachment research across disciplines	Environmental Psychology

Year	Author(s)	Milestone / Contribution	Discipline
2013	Ramkissoon et al.	Linked sense of place with sustainable tourism, authenticity, and pro-environmental behaviours	Tourism Studies
2014	Kirillova et al.	Proposed aesthetic framework for tourist experience using embodied perception	Tourism Studies
2019	Jarratt et al.	Developed co-creation methods for fostering belonging and local engagement in tourism planning	Tourism, Planning
2022	Erfani	Integrated theoretical strands into a unified framework for cultivating sense of place in tourism contexts	Tourism Studies

Source: Author's own compilation based on literature review.

4.2. Development of the sense of place concept in tourism studies

The foundational insights of Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph introduced the emotional and phenomenological dimensions of place, laying crucial groundwork for tourism scholars. Tuan's (1974, 1977) notion of topophilia (the affective bond between people and place) sparked interest in how sensory experience, memory, and imagination influence spatial perception. While originally framed within humanistic geography, tourism researchers adapted these ideas to understand how visitors form emotional attachments to destinations. Tuan's emphasis on experiential and emotional encounters with space informed early tourism studies exploring how tourists make sense of unfamiliar environments through multisensory immersion and symbolic meaning-making (Knudsen and Waade, 2010).

Stedman's (2002) concept of place attachment and symbolic meaning further advanced these ideas by introducing an empirical framework for understanding place satisfaction. In tourism studies, his work was foundational for examining how residents' or visitors' emotional and cognitive bonds influence attitudes toward tourism development, environmental conservation, and heritage preservation. The differentiation between place meaning and place attachment (Stedman, 2002) allowed scholars to explore how tourism can both reinforce and disrupt local meanings, especially in contexts of rapid change or commodification (Ramkissoon et al., 2013).

These theoretical contributions were elaborated upon in several important directions. Jorgensen and Stedman (2006) developed a multidimensional model incorporating place identity, attachment, and dependence, which tourism researchers adopted to explore diverse relationships between tourists and destinations. Their work provided tools for measuring loyalty, repeat visitation, and perceived authenticity, expanding the field beyond descriptive accounts toward structured empirical analysis (Ramkissoon and Mavondo, 2015).

Building on Tuan's affective geography, Jamal and Hill (2004) introduced a framework linking sense of place to discourses of authenticity in tourism. They argued that tourist experiences are mediated through overlapping layers of objective, constructive, and existential authenticity each shaping how place is felt, understood, and remembered. This approach showed the interpretive and co-constructed nature of place in tourism settings, resonating with Tuan's emphasis on subjective experience while situating it within cultural and temporal processes.

Stokowski (2002) extended these ideas by arguing that sense of place is socially produced through language, memory, and power. Her contribution shifted the focus from static landscapes to performative and contested spaces shaped by tourism narratives and stakeholder interests. This perspective aligns with both Tuan's experiential focus and Stedman's attention to meaning, but reframes them within the social construction of place.

More recently, Erfani (2022) integrated these diverse threads into a unified conceptual framework that highlights the interdependencies among individuals, communities, and spatial planning processes. His work offers a tool for bridging theory and practice in tourism contexts, suggesting that cultivating sense of place

requires alignment between personal affect, cultural narratives, and planning interventions.

In sum, tourism studies have expanded the foundational insights of Tuan and Stedman by contextualising them within the dynamic and multifaceted realities of tourist destinations. Their legacies continue to inform contemporary research that sees sense of place not just as an emotional response but as a critical dimension of destination development, visitor experience, and spatial justice.

4.3. Embodied experience and sense of place

The embodied dimension of place experience has been increasingly recognised as a vital aspect of how individuals relate to and interpret spatial environments. Within tourism studies, this approach foregrounds the role of sensory perception, physical movement, and affective responses in constructing place meaning. Rather than conceiving place solely as a cognitive construct or symbolic system, the embodied perspective explores how bodily engagement with space produces experiential depth and attachment.

Yi-Fu Tuan's (1977) work on topophilia introduced the significance of sensory perception and bodily experience in forming attachments to place. Although his writings have been extensively applied across disciplines, in tourism scholarship the sensual and affective resonance of destinations has been developed further through empirical studies of how tourists engage with environments. These include tactile, auditory, olfactory, and kinetic experiences that contribute to the subjective richness of place (Tuan, 1977).

The framework of embodied cognition, as developed by Varela et al., (1991), has been influential in supporting this line of inquiry. Their perspective holds that cognition is not disembodied or abstract but arises through interactions between the body and the world. In tourism contexts, this has led to a focus on how walking, climbing, or other physical activities structure the ways tourists perceive and relate to destinations. The embodied dimension becomes central to how experiences are formed and remembered (Varela et al., 1991).

Gibson's (1979) ecological theory of perception introduced the concept of "affordances," referring to the possibilities for action that environments provide. In tourism, this idea has informed discussions of how landscape features invite or

enable specific types of engagement. For example, the design of walkable neighbourhoods or scenic trails not only facilitates access but also conditions the embodied experience of place (Gibson, 1979).

Research by Kyle and Chick (2007) has demonstrated that the emotional dimension of place is often intertwined with bodily experiences. Their findings suggest that physical interaction with a destination such as participating in outdoor recreation produces affective bonds, including nostalgia, joy, or a sense of tranquillity. These emotional responses contribute to the development of place attachment and influence how destinations are evaluated and remembered (Kyle and Chick, 2007).

Kirillova et al. (2014) propose an aesthetic framework based on embodied perception that includes dimensions such as coherence, novelty, and complexity. Their study highlights the multisensory aspects of tourist place evaluation, indicating that aesthetic appreciation involves not only visual judgement but also kinaesthetic and emotional responsiveness. This framework extends the discussion on how tourists form impressions of place through direct bodily experience and not merely through cultural symbolism (Kirillova et al., 2014).

The relationship between urban aesthetics and social values has also been examined through the lens of embodied experience. Speake and Kennedy (2019) analyse how affluent classes shape tourism environments through aesthetic preferences. Their study shows how bodies are positioned within curated spaces, often aligning with dominant ideals of taste, while also revealing tensions between sensory enjoyment and class-based exclusion (Speake and Kennedy, 2019).

Lewicka (2011), in her comprehensive review of place attachment research, emphasises that embodied practices, including repetitive movement and spatial routines, reinforce the familiarity and intimacy that underlie attachment. In tourism, repeated visits or habitual patterns of movement such as returning to the same beach or engaging in similar holiday rituals can deepen an individual's sense of place. These practices exemplify how place becomes meaningful through lived bodily experience rather than detached observation (Lewicka, 2011).

The embodied turn in sense of place research has enriched understandings of how destinations are experienced and valued. It brings attention to the non-verbal, pre-reflective, and sensory ways people interact with environments, offering a necessary complement to cognitive or symbolic frameworks. Within tourism studies, this

perspective has contributed to more holistic accounts of place experience, recognising the active role of the body in shaping spatial attachment and memory.

4.4. Cultural geography and sense of place

Cultural geography contributes significantly to the study of sense of place in tourism by emphasising the social, symbolic, and narrative dimensions of place-making. In this context, sense of place emerges not only through physical landscapes but also through cultural practices, collective memory, and meaning-making processes. Storytelling, rituals, and festivals all help transform geographic locations into meaningful destinations, shaping both tourist experiences and community identities. Storytelling is a central mechanism through which place meanings are constructed and communicated. Narratives of history, myth, and identity offer tourists a lens through which to understand a destination. MacCannell (1976) introduced the concept of "staged authenticity" to describe how local cultures mediate these experiences for visitors. By crafting and presenting narratives that appear authentic, communities offer tourists access to cultural and historical depth, allowing for more meaningful engagement. These narratives do not simply inform but structure emotional and symbolic connections to place.

Rituals and public celebrations also function as powerful tools for expressing place identity. Festivals, for example, allow visitors to participate in culturally meaningful activities that reinforce social cohesion and shared values. Graburn (1989) described tourism as a ritualised practice in itself, where festivals serve as cultural windows through which visitors glimpse community life. Cohen (1988) added that participation in such events often facilitates emotional attachment, as tourists are momentarily incorporated into the cultural fabric of the host community. These embodied and affective experiences can significantly shape visitors' perceptions and memories of place.

Cultural geography also addresses how power operates in the construction and representation of place. Zukin (1995) argued that aesthetic representations of urban space are often shaped by dominant interests, which influence what is preserved, highlighted, or excluded in tourism development. This concern is particularly relevant in contexts where cultural homogenisation threatens to obscure local distinctiveness. At the same time, Massey (1994) proposed a relational view of place,

conceptualising it as a dynamic and open process rather than a fixed entity. From this perspective, sense of place is continually negotiated through intersecting social, political, and economic forces, making tourism both a site of cultural production and contestation.

Recent scholarship highlights the importance of integrating community perspectives and local knowledge in tourism development. Walker and Moscardo (2019) demonstrated how Indigenous interpretation practices on Stanley Island in Australia provide tourists with deeper, more respectful understandings of place while reinforcing cultural sustainability. Similarly, Csurgó and Smith (2022) examined rural tourism in Hungary, finding that intangible cultural heritage plays a significant role in shaping how residents and visitors engage with place. Their work highlights the need to support place-making practices that are grounded in local experience and that foster long-term community involvement.

Further studies have explored how a sense of place can also enhance community participation in tourism. Liu and Cheung (2016) investigated Tai O, a fishing village in Hong Kong, and showed how strong place attachment encouraged both residents and emigrants to contribute to tourism development and cultural preservation. Their findings indicate that a deeply rooted sense of place supports sustainable forms of tourism, strengthening the cultural and environmental integrity of destinations. Overall, cultural geography offers an essential lens for understanding how sense of place is produced, interpreted, and maintained in tourism settings.

4.5. Core dimensions of sense of place: attachment, identity, dependence, and belonging

This subchapter explores four interrelated constructs such as place attachment, place identity, place dependence, and belonging, that are widely recognised as foundational components of the sense of place. These dimensions have been developed through interdisciplinary research in environmental psychology, geography, sociology, and tourism studies, offering conceptual clarity to what has often been treated as an affective or symbolic abstraction.

Understanding these concepts is essential for unpacking how individuals and communities develop and sustain emotional, cognitive, and functional relationships

with specific environments. While sense of place often refers to a generalised feeling of connectedness or meaning, these constructs help delineate its multifaceted nature. In the context of tourism, these dimensions offer valuable insights into visitor experiences, and resident attitudes, and destination development strategies. By detailing these four dimensions, this section provides a conceptual bridge between the dimensions of sense of place and its practical cultivation through tourism planning, heritage preservation, and community engagement, which will be explored in the next section.

4.5.1. Place attachment

Place attachment refers to the emotional and affective bonds individuals or groups form with specific geographic locations (Altman and Low, 1992). These bonds develop through prolonged interaction, familiarity, and the accumulation of meaningful experiences, whether through residence, visitation, or symbolic engagement. Place attachment is not merely sentimental; it shapes behavioural intentions, social identity, and even political attitudes toward place-related issues (Manzo and Devine-Wright, 2013).

The concept has its roots in environmental psychology and humanistic geography, both of which emphasise the human need for rootedness and meaningful spatial relationships. As mentioned earlier, Tuan (1977) describes this affective bond as "topophilia," the love of place, arguing that sensory and existential encounters with the environment form the basis of such attachments. Similarly, Relph (1976) sees place attachment as a manifestation of existential insideness, where the individual experiences a deep sense of identification and comfort within a place. These theoretical foundations highlight the emotional and experiential dimensions of spatial bonding.

Proshansky et al., (1983) added further nuance by conceptualising place attachment as part of *place identity*, where the environment becomes embedded in one's self-concept. However, place attachment can exist independently of cognitive identification, particularly in contexts such as tourism, where even short-term, affect-rich experiences can foster strong emotional responses. This is especially relevant for repeat visitors or second-home tourists who feel a sense of familiarity and longing for a destination despite limited residence (McIntyre et al., 2006).

In empirical tourism research, Kyle et al., (2005) developed a two-dimensional model of place attachment that includes *place identity* and *place dependence*. They found that attachment increases with activity involvement and time spent at a location, and that emotional attachment plays a role in destination loyalty (Kyle et al, 2005). Ramkissoon et al. (2011) further demonstrate that tourists who are more affectively attached to a destination are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviours and support local conservation initiatives. This suggests that attachment has behavioural consequences and is not limited to passive sentimentality.

Importantly, place attachment is not static; it evolves over time and is shaped by social, cultural, and political contexts. It can be influenced by community ties, cultural meanings, personal milestones, and even conflict or loss (Scannell and Gifford, 2010). In tourism development, strong place attachment among residents can both facilitate and hinder planning processes. Devine-Wright (2009) highlights this duality in his concept of “place-protective action,” where individuals oppose development that they perceive as threatening to their emotional ties with a place.

Tourism scholars have also explored how place attachment interacts with issues of authenticity, sustainability, and commodification. For example, Hernández et al. (2010) showed that residents with high place attachment are more sensitive to changes in their environment and more critical of tourism initiatives that may disrupt the social or ecological balance. In contrast, visitors with strong attachment may serve as advocates for preservation and cultural sensitivity, particularly in heritage tourism settings (Yüksel et al., 2010).

Recent work by Lewicka (2011) provides a comprehensive review of the psychological dimensions of place attachment, noting that factors such as age, mobility, cultural background, and personal history all moderate how individuals form attachments. In tourism, this indicates the importance of differentiated approaches that account for visitor heterogeneity and varying levels of emotional investment.

Place attachment provides a vital emotional framework within the broader sense of place construct. It serves as a lens for understanding how individuals develop meaningful and enduring relationships with destinations, and why such relationships matter for tourism sustainability, resident satisfaction, and destination management.

Recognising and fostering place attachment while being mindful of its complexities can lead to more inclusive and ethically grounded tourism planning.

4.5.2. Place identity

Place identity refers to the way in which physical settings become part of an individual's self-concept, shaping how people define themselves in relation to specific geographic locations (Proshansky et al., 1983). As a psychological and symbolic component of sense of place, place identity captures the deep cognitive, emotional, and symbolic bonds that tie individuals or groups to a place, embedding it within their social identity, values, and life narratives.

Originating in environmental psychology, the concept was formally introduced by Proshansky et al. (1983), who argued that individuals do not only live in places but live through them. According to their framework, place identity forms part of a person's broader self-identity, incorporating cognitions about the physical environment as it relates to one's values, roles, and preferences (Proshansky et al., 1983). This early formulation emphasized the role of place in supporting psychological stability and continuity, particularly in the face of social or spatial change.

Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) refined the theory by identifying four key processes: distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, all of which contribute to the role of place in reinforcing identity. For example, a historic neighbourhood may symbolise tradition and heritage for its long-term residents, thereby affirming their sense of temporal continuity and belonging.

In geography and anthropology, this concept resonates with the idea that identity is always situated and constructed through particular spaces, landscapes, and cultural contexts (Cresswell, 2004; Massey, 1994). As Massey argued, places are not static backdrops but are active agents in identity formation, shaped by flows of power, culture, and meaning. Place identity, from this view, is inherently relational and dynamic, constructed through interactions between people and place over time.

In the context of tourism, place identity has emerged as a valuable lens for understanding both resident and visitor experiences. Ramkissoon and Mavondo (2015) show that residents with strong place identity tend to express higher satisfaction with their community and demonstrate more willingness to engage in pro-tourism behaviours. Similarly, tourists may adopt symbolic associations with a

destination, particularly when the place reflects their values or aspirations such as spirituality, environmental consciousness, or cultural heritage (Ramkissoon et al., 2013).

Destination branding practices often attempt to tap into or even shape place identity by projecting coherent narratives about a location's meaning and values (Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013). However, these top-down constructions may clash with residents' lived sense of identity, leading to tension or resistance. Devine-Wright and Clayton (2010) emphasise the potential dissonance between imposed representations of place and the locally embedded place identity, especially in contexts of rapid tourism development, gentrification, or environmental change.

In heritage and cultural tourism, the alignment between place identity and cultural preservation is particularly significant. When the symbolic meanings attributed to a site resonate with both visitors and local communities, tourism can reinforce rather than erode place identity (Ashworth, 2005). This is evident in the preservation of Indigenous landscapes or sacred places, where identity is closely bound to the land and its stories.

Empirical studies also show that place identity is associated with place-protective attitudes and behaviours. Hernández et al. (2010) found that individuals with stronger place identity were more likely to oppose developments they perceived as harmful to the character of their environment. This reflects an important ethical dimension of the concept: that identity-based bonds to place often motivate action in defence of its integrity and meaning.

Moreover, the concept has been extended to include collective place identity and shared symbolic frameworks through which communities understand and express their uniqueness. This has implications for tourism planning and participatory governance, where recognising and integrating community-defined place identities can lead to more inclusive and context-sensitive strategies (Jarratt et al., 2019; Lewicka, 2011).

4.5.3. Place dependence

Place dependence refers to the functional attachment individuals or groups develop to a location based on its capacity to support their goals, activities, or needs better than alternative settings (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981). As a dimension of the broader sense of place framework, place dependence is primarily concerned with the

instrumental or utilitarian qualities of a place (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001). This contrasts with place attachment, which is more affective in nature, although the two often intersect and reinforce one another.

The origin of the concept lies in environmental psychology, where it was initially introduced to describe the functional fit between individuals and spatial environments. Stokols and Shumaker (1981) proposed that dependence emerges when specific places facilitate goal achievement or support valued activities more effectively than others. For example, a surfing beach, a particular hiking trail, or a vibrant local market may become irreplaceable due to the opportunities they uniquely offer.

Within tourism studies, place dependence has become a useful lens for exploring how visitors evaluate and return to destinations. Kyle et al., (2005) distinguished place dependence from place identity, arguing that while identity-based connections are rooted in meaning and self-concept, dependence is driven by perceived quality and functionality. Their research demonstrated that tourists who view a destination as superior for a given activity (e.g., hiking or fishing) exhibit stronger loyalty and a higher likelihood of return visitation (Kyle et al., 2005).

Place dependence is often closely tied to recreational settings, where specific landscapes offer particular affordances (Gibson, 1979). For instance, mountaineers may depend on a unique alpine terrain, while birdwatchers may rely on a wetland ecosystem not available elsewhere. These settings gain significance not just through affective experience but because they enable distinctive practices central to users' lifestyles or identities (Warzecha and Lime, 2001).

Jorgensen and Stedman's (2001) multidimensional model of sense of place incorporates place dependence alongside attachment and identity, showing how the utilitarian, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of place interact. Their empirical work found that while dependence can be a precursor to attachment, in many cases people become emotionally attached to places only after recognising their functional importance. This temporal sequence suggests that dependence may initially be pragmatic but can evolve into deeper affective bonds over time.

In tourism, the concept has also been applied to understanding visitor satisfaction, place loyalty, and behavioural intentions. Yuksel et al., (2010) found that tourists with strong place dependence are more likely to perceive value, express loyalty, and

engage in word-of-mouth promotion. These findings support the argument that functional attributes such as access, affordability, service quality, or unique experiences are integral to destination development strategies that seek to foster repeat visitation.

However, the utility-based logic of place dependence also opens it to volatility. If the functional qualities of a destination degrade or competitors emerge offering better alternatives, dependent visitors may quickly shift their loyalty. This has implications for sustainability: destinations relying primarily on place dependence may struggle with resilience unless they also cultivate emotional or identity-based connections (Ramkissoon et al., 2013).

From a resident perspective, place dependence can influence community attitudes toward tourism development. Residents who rely on place-based resources such as access to fishing grounds, agricultural land, or sacred sites may resist changes that threaten these dependencies (Devine-Wright, 2009). In such cases, conflicts can arise between tourism expansion and local livelihoods, especially when planning processes overlook functional needs in favour of aesthetic or branding goals.

4.5.4. Place belonging

Place belonging encompasses feelings of acceptance, familiarity, and connectedness, which are not only spatial but also deeply relational and affective (Antonsich, 2010). While place attachment and identity describe emotional ties and self-concept in relation to place, belonging captures the broader existential condition of inclusion, rootedness, and recognition within both physical and social landscapes (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

The notion of belonging extends from sociological and anthropological discussions of identity, community, and territory. It involves both subjective feelings such as emotional security and comfort; and external processes, including social acceptance, cultural representation, and political inclusion. In this regard, belonging is not just about being in a place but also about being recognised and valued within it. This distinction is particularly salient in tourism contexts where residents and visitors negotiate symbolic and material space.

Within the sense of place literature, belonging is increasingly acknowledged as a relational and dynamic phenomenon. Manzo and Perkins (2006) argue that belonging is forged through everyday practices, social interactions, and shared

rituals that embed individuals into local lifeworlds. Their research highlights how communal spaces, local traditions, and interpersonal networks contribute to a grounded sense of belonging, which enhances place satisfaction and well-being (Manzo and Perkins, 2006). This aligns with Massey's (1994) relational view of place as a constellation of trajectories; belonging, then, is shaped by participation in these flows rather than by essentialist ties to territory.

In tourism studies, the concept of belonging has been explored both from the perspective of visitors and host communities. For tourists, feelings of belonging can emerge through repeated visitation, cultural immersion, or meaningful interpersonal experiences. Di Masso et al. (2019) describe how even temporary or episodic experiences of belonging such as participating in a local festival or returning to the same holiday destination can foster a significant emotional connection to place. These experiences often blur the lines between tourist and temporary resident, especially in the context of lifestyle migration or long-term stays.

For residents, belonging can be challenged or reinforced by tourism development. A growing body of research has shown that residents' sense of belonging can be eroded by the commodification or overuse of local spaces (Relph, 1976; Devine-Wright, 2009). When public areas become dominated by tourist activity or when cultural representations are shaped for external consumption, local inhabitants may experience displacement; not in the physical sense, but in the symbolic or emotional register (Cresswell, 1996). This loss of belonging may translate into resistance to tourism or calls for more inclusive planning processes.

Recent studies have also begun to explore how belonging is cultivated through design and planning. Jarratt et al. (2019) show how co-creating sense of place toolkits with local stakeholders helps foster a shared narrative of belonging. By engaging residents in defining what makes their place meaningful, such participatory methods support both individual and collective belonging, enhancing the authenticity and sustainability of tourism initiatives.

Furthermore, belonging intersects with mental health and resilience. Lewicka (2011) emphasises that a strong sense of belonging contributes to psychological well-being, providing a buffer against stress and alienation. In tourism contexts, this is particularly relevant for seasonal workers, second-home owners, and diaspora visitors, for whom belonging may be partial, contested, or transient. Understanding

these nuanced experiences can inform policies aimed at fostering more inclusive and responsive tourism environments.

4.6.Cultivating a sense of place

The cultivation of a sense of place in tourism involves intentional practices that enhance emotional, social, and cultural connections between people and destinations. While sense of place may emerge organically through lived experience, it can also be actively nurtured through strategies grounded in community engagement, cultural expression, and participatory planning. This section outlines such practices, drawing from tourism, geography, and cultural studies literature.

One effective strategy is place-based storytelling, which communicates the cultural and historical narratives of a location. Through guided tours, interpretive signage, digital media, and performance, storytelling transforms physical space into meaningful place (Chronis, 2012; Rickly-Boyd, 2013). Importantly, local participation in shaping and delivering these narratives helps ensure authenticity and inclusivity, reinforcing the connection between community identity and tourism development (Chronis, 2005; Haldrup and Larsen, 2011).

Public art and community art projects, including murals, sculptures, and installations, provide visual representations of local identity and history. Such projects often emerge from collaborative processes between artists, residents, and institutions, reinforcing belonging and cultural continuity (Duxbury et al., 2020). They also contribute to the aesthetic and emotional landscape of destinations, creating visual anchors that facilitate attachment (Zelinka and Brennan, 2001).

Food heritage initiatives such as farmers' markets, culinary festivals, and cooking workshops invite tourists to engage with place through sensory and embodied experience. Sims (2009) highlight how food functions as a carrier of local culture, linking tourism with agricultural traditions, seasonal rhythms, and identity formation. These events support small-scale producers, generate social interactions, and create memorable tourist experiences that deepen place connection.

Participatory planning and urban design practices have become central to place-making initiatives. Through processes such as community mapping, visioning workshops, and co-design, residents are empowered to shape their environment in line with local values and needs (Manzo and Perkins, 2006). In tourism contexts,

such practices help avoid top-down interventions and ensure that public spaces reflect lived experiences and support ongoing relationships to place (Richards and Duif, 2019).

Volunteer tourism and stewardship programmes offer tourists the opportunity to contribute to conservation, heritage preservation, or community development projects. These engagements promote a sense of responsibility and emotional investment in the destination (McGehee and Santos, 2005; Wearing, 2001). Studies show that tourists who participate in stewardship activities often experience a deeper sense of connection and attachment to the place (Guttentag, 2009).

Everyday community practices, such as gardening projects, neighbourhood cafés, or public gatherings, may also be included within tourism narratives. While modest in scope, these practices express the rhythms and values of local life. Urry (2002) and Edensor (2001) argue that observing or engaging in everyday routines offers tourists a counterpoint to commodified experiences and can create more grounded, embodied place connections.

Finally, creative placemaking has gained attention in tourism and urban development. As defined by Markusen and Gadwa (2010), placemaking initiatives can include cultural districts, pop-up events, and long-term strategies linking heritage, creativity, and identity. When grounded in community participation, such initiatives support resilience, economic vitality, and local distinctiveness (Florida, 2002).

5. CREATIVE TOURISM

5.1 Creative tourism: concept, origins, and theoretical foundations

Creative tourism has emerged as a distinct form of tourism that emphasizes active engagement, skill development, and authentic interaction with local cultures. Unlike traditional cultural tourism, which often centres on passive consumption of heritage sites and performances, creative tourism encourages visitors to co-create experiences by participating in hands-on activities, such as craft workshops, cooking classes, dance lessons, or community-based events (Richards and Raymond, 2000; OECD, 2014). This participatory approach develops a deeper sense of connection with the destination, enhancing both the tourist experience and the cultural vitality of host communities.

The development of creative tourism is closely linked to broader social and economic shifts, including the rise of the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), the growth of cultural and creative industries (UNESCO, 2006), and the increasing demand for authentic, personalised travel (Richards, 2013). In contrast to standardised tourism products, creative tourism offers opportunities for self-expression and learning, often in small-scale, locally embedded contexts. These experiences allow tourists to generate intangible value while contributing to local economies and identity preservation (Smith, 2009).

Historically, the roots of creative tourism can be traced to a broader transformation in cultural tourism itself. Traditional cultural tourism, often focused on heritage monuments, museums, and elite cultural performances, began expanding in the late 20th century to include more intangible, everyday forms of culture, such as food, crafts, and festivals (Richards, 2001). As destinations sought to diversify their offerings and respond to changing visitor expectations, creative tourism emerged as a next step, enabling tourists to not only observe but also participate in the production and reproduction of culture (Tan et al., 2014).

The theoretical underpinning of creative tourism draws from multiple disciplines. Pine and Gilmore's (1999) concept of the experience economy posits that economic value increasingly resides in memorable and meaningful experiences, rather than goods or services. In this context, creative tourism operates as an experience-based economy, where emotional engagement and learning are central. Tourists seek

experiences that are immersive, educational, and emotionally resonant, thereby producing symbolic and cultural capital (Richards, 2011; Bourdieu, 1986).

The notion of cultural capital is particularly relevant. Bourdieu (1986) described cultural capital as the accumulation of knowledge, skills, and dispositions acquired through cultural engagement. Creative tourism enables tourists to expand their cultural capital by learning traditional skills or participating in local artistic practices, which in turn enhances their social identity and status (Waite and Gibson, 2014).

Another key theoretical pillar is the concept of creative cities (Landry, 2000), which positions urban areas as engines of innovation and cultural production. In this context, creative tourism aligns with urban regeneration strategies by leveraging local creative industries, fostering community engagement, and revalorising underutilised urban spaces. Cities and regions that integrate creative tourism into their development policies often see benefits in terms of cultural revitalisation, economic diversification, and place branding (OECD, 2014; Richards and Marques, 2012).

Creative tourism is also increasingly framed as a sustainable alternative to mass tourism. It promotes slower, deeper engagement with places and people, typically involves smaller groups, and supports local artisans and cultural producers (UNESCO, 2006; OECD, 2014). By involving tourists in meaning-making processes and creative co-production, it not only fosters richer experiences but also strengthens local identity, resilience, and sense of place (Duxbury and Richards, 2019).

Carvalho et al. (2019) conducted a structured literature review of 47 academic publications on creative tourism, primarily published between 2000 and 2018, with a significant concentration of contributions after 2010. Their review identified three dominant theoretical pillars shaping the field: (1) the integration of creativity into tourism, influenced by creative industries, creative cities, and the creative class; (2) the concept of specialized consumption, where postmodern tourists pursue authenticity, self-development, and participatory cultural experiences; and (3) the experience economy paradigm, which emphasizes co-created, immersive interactions between tourists and hosts. The authors found that creative tourism differentiates itself from traditional cultural tourism by focusing on intangible, skill-based, and locally embedded offerings that foster deeper connections with communities. They also observed a shift from staged experiences to more

collaborative and relational models, underscoring the importance of co-creation and cultural capital development. Furthermore, the review highlights the central role of stakeholders particularly local communities, creative professionals, and policy-makers in co-developing sustainable and context-sensitive creative tourism models. The authors advocate for horizontal economic structures and public-private partnerships that empower all actors involved in the tourism value chain and enhance the authenticity and resilience of destination development (Carvalho et al., 2019).

Creative tourism represents a paradigm shift from passive cultural consumption to active, co-creative participation. It builds on the foundations of cultural tourism while incorporating new perspectives from economics, sociology, and cultural policy. As such, it has a huge potential to play a key role in contemporary tourism development strategies aimed at sustainability, innovation, and deeper cultural exchange.

5.2 Impacts of creative tourism

Creative tourism exerts significant influence on destinations through its economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions, offering a more sustainable and participatory model of tourism development. Its impacts are shaped by the ways it engages both tourists and local communities in co-creative processes, fostering long-term value beyond short-term visitor consumption.

Economically, creative tourism supports local development by contributing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), especially in the cultural and creative sectors. Through the sale of artisanal goods, creative workshops, and locally delivered experiences, it stimulates entrepreneurship and employment, often in peripheral or rural areas that might otherwise be excluded from mainstream tourism circuits (OECD, 2014; Richards and Marques, 2012). This form of tourism enhances economic diversification by creating demand for niche services and facilitating innovation among local actors (Tan et al., 2014). It also reduces economic leakage, as revenue tends to remain within the community and circulates through local networks (Duxbury and Richards, 2019).

Socially and culturally, creative tourism fosters intercultural dialogue, promotes local pride, and enhances community resilience. Tourists become active participants rather than passive observers, engaging with local traditions and crafts in ways that

strengthen mutual understanding and shared meaning (Waitt and Gibson, 2014). These interactions can lead to greater appreciation of cultural diversity and can empower local communities by reinforcing the value of their cultural expressions. Creative tourism also helps maintain intangible cultural heritage by creating viable markets for practices such as weaving, pottery, music, and storytelling (UNESCO, 2006; Richards, 2011).

However, scholars caution that these benefits depend on community involvement and ownership. Without adequate local participation, creative tourism risks replicating patterns of cultural commodification and inequality found in other tourism models (Cole, 2007). Ensuring that residents have control over the design and delivery of creative tourism products is essential for fostering inclusive and equitable development (Duxbury, 2021).

From an environmental perspective, creative tourism is generally seen as a low-impact, high-value alternative to mass tourism. It often involves small-scale, localised experiences that minimise pressure on natural resources and heritage sites (de Araujo and Bramwell, 2002). Activities are typically place-based and seasonally dispersed, reducing overcrowding and encouraging year-round visitation. Furthermore, creative tourism can support environmental awareness by linking cultural practices to landscape stewardship and sustainability narratives (Chhabra, 2010; Richards, 2013).

Beyond these dimensions, creative tourism plays a role in enhancing the sense of place for both visitors and residents. By engaging tourists in meaningful, culturally embedded activities, it cultivates emotional and symbolic attachments to places, reinforcing local identity and belonging (Vidal González, 2008; Duxbury and Campbell, 2011). These impacts are especially important in an era of globalised tourism, where destinations often struggle to maintain distinctiveness and authenticity.

The impacts of creative tourism extend well beyond economics. It contributes to the social, cultural, and environmental vitality of destinations, provided that its implementation is participatory, community-led, and sensitive to context. As destinations seek more resilient and sustainable tourism models, creative tourism offers a compelling framework for value creation, cultural preservation, and experiential richness.

5.3 Challenges and opportunities in creative tourism

Creative tourism, while offering significant potential for sustainable and inclusive development, also presents a set of challenges that require careful navigation. These relate primarily to the tension between authenticity and innovation, community participation, impact management, and the integration of digital technologies. At the same time, these very areas present fertile ground for innovation and long-term growth when approached strategically.

One of the most prominent challenges is balancing authenticity with the demands for innovation and marketability. As creative tourism seeks to offer participatory and immersive experiences, there is a risk that cultural expressions may be simplified or repackaged to meet tourist expectations, undermining their integrity (Richards and Wilson, 2006). Maintaining the authenticity of local practices while adapting them for creative experiences requires ongoing negotiation between tradition and transformation (Binkhorst and den Dekker, 2009). The solution lies in supporting local actors to co-create tourism products that reflect their values and identities, ensuring the continuity of cultural practices in new forms (Smith, 2009).

Community involvement is another critical area. Without the active participation and leadership of local stakeholders, creative tourism may reproduce patterns of exclusion or result in experiences that lack cultural depth. Scholars have emphasised the need for bottom-up approaches that empower communities to design and manage their own tourism narratives (Cole, 2007; Duxbury, 2021). Participatory governance and capacity-building are thus essential to avoid external control and ensure equitable benefit distribution. Moreover, engaging underrepresented groups such as women, minorities, and youth can enhance inclusivity and diversify creative outputs (OECD, 2014).

A third challenge concerns the management of tourist impacts, especially as creative tourism becomes more popular. While typically associated with small-scale and dispersed activities, increased demand can lead to pressure on cultural sites, loss of local character, or community fatigue. As with cultural tourism, careful attention must be paid to issues of commodification, carrying capacity, and spatial justice (Mckercher and du Cros, 2006). Strategic planning frameworks that integrate creative tourism into broader cultural and territorial development agendas can help mitigate these risks (Duxbury and Richards, 2019).

At the same time, creative tourism offers unique opportunities for innovation, especially through the integration of digital tools and platforms. Digital technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and mobile storytelling apps allow for new forms of engagement with local heritage and creativity (Timothy and Boyd, 2015; Xiang and Fesenmaier, 2016). These tools can make creative experiences more accessible and interactive, while also serving as powerful promotional channels. Importantly, digital platforms can also enable small creative businesses to connect with niche markets, overcoming spatial and economic limitations (Richards, 2020).

Furthermore, creative tourism opens avenues for destination regeneration and branding, particularly in post-industrial or rural areas seeking to reposition themselves. By drawing on local assets such as crafts, performing arts, or gastronomy, destinations can develop distinctive identities that attract visitors seeking authentic and participatory experiences (Della Lucia and Trunfio, 2018). Creative tourism can thus contribute to placemaking strategies that strengthen the emotional and symbolic ties between people and place, enhancing both visitor satisfaction and resident well-being.

The challenges and opportunities of creative tourism are deeply intertwined. Managing authenticity, empowering communities, mitigating impact, and integrating technology are not only obstacles but also the levers through which creative tourism can achieve its transformative potential. Success in this domain requires participatory, locally grounded, and adaptive approaches that align with the principles of sustainability, equity, and cultural vitality.

5.4. Best practices in creative tourism and stakeholder roles

Recent research in creative tourism has increasingly focused on real-world implementations that bridge theory and practice, offering valuable insights into how creative initiatives shape place-based development and enhance a destination's milieu and sense of place. This section presents selected best practice examples of cities and regions that have adopted creative tourism as a strategic tool for sustainable development, cultural engagement, and identity building.

Dublin, Ireland, offers a widely recognized example of a city that has strategically embraced creative tourism as part of its urban regeneration and place-making

initiatives by leveraging its rich literary heritage, dynamic arts scene, and participatory cultural experiences to attract visitors seeking co-creative and meaningful engagement (Richards, 2011; OECD, 2014). As a UNESCO City of Literature, the city supports immersive offerings such as creative writing workshops, storytelling events, and literary pub tours that transcend passive consumption and foster place-based learning (UNESCO, 2024a; Richards and Marques, 2012). Dublin's creative tourism development is driven by a wide array of stakeholders, including city authorities, cultural institutions, grassroots organizations, and local entrepreneurs. The Dublin City Council plays a key coordinating role through its Culture Company, which facilitates access to cultural spaces and fosters inclusive cultural participation (Dublin City Council, 2020). Local artists, tour operators, and community groups actively shape the content and delivery of creative experiences, ensuring authenticity and local ownership (Duxbury and Richards, 2019). This collaborative governance model strengthens place identity and supports sustainable urban development by integrating economic, social, and cultural objectives (Landry, 2000; Pratt and Jeffcutt, 2011). As such, Dublin serves as a best-practice example of how stakeholder engagement and multi-level cooperation can advance creative tourism in a way that benefits both residents and visitors.

Loulé, a small city in southern Portugal, has become an internationally recognized example of creative tourism development in a non-metropolitan context, emphasizing local knowledge, craft traditions, and community engagement (Duxbury and Richards, 2019; Carvalho et al., 2019). The city's creative tourism strategy focuses on hands-on experiences such as traditional pottery, copper beating, weaving, and culinary workshops, offering visitors the opportunity to learn directly from local artisans in an immersive and participatory setting (OECD, 2014; Loulé Criativo, 2023). The initiative *Loulé Criativo*, launched by the municipality, serves as the main coordination platform, showcasing a successful model of stakeholder collaboration between the public sector, artisans, creative professionals, cultural NGOs, and academic institutions (Duxbury et al., 2017). The municipality of Loulé plays a central governance role by providing infrastructure, funding, and policy support, while also fostering partnerships with international networks such as Creative Tourism Network® and UNESCO Creative Cities (Loulé Criativo, 2023). Artisans, as key stakeholders, are not only service providers but also cultural

ambassadors, contributing to the revitalization of endangered traditions and reinforcing the city's unique sense of place (Richards, 2020; Carvalho et al., 2019). Loulé's approach highlights how creative tourism can support sustainable development, heritage preservation, and social innovation through inclusive stakeholder engagement and locally rooted creative economies.

Barcelona stands as a pioneering city in the field of creative tourism, widely recognized for its integration of culture, design, and innovation into tourism planning. The city's creative districts, such as Poblenou and Raval, offer participatory experiences in contemporary art, architecture, and urban storytelling (Evans, 2009; Richards, 2011). Festivals, makerspaces, and community workshops promote direct interaction between residents and visitors. A wide array of stakeholders such as Barcelona City Council, creative clusters, civil society organizations, and universities collaborate to shape a sustainable tourism model that addresses overtourism while promoting cultural vitality (OECD, 2014; Duxbury and Richards, 2019). Barcelona's long-standing commitment to cultural policy and bottom-up innovation makes it a leading case of creative tourism within a dense urban setting.

Bologna integrates creative tourism with cultural policy and academic innovation, drawing on its status as home to the world's oldest university. The city fosters participatory experiences in music, cinema, street art, and gastronomy, often linked to its rich political and intellectual history (Richards and Marques, 2012). As a UNESCO City of Music, Bologna leverages local festivals, independent film houses, and cooperatives to offer co-creative cultural programs. Stakeholders including Bologna Municipality, the University of Bologna, and grassroots cultural associations collaborate to connect tourism with urban creativity, heritage, and learning (Pratt and Jeffcutt, 2011; Duxbury, 2021). Bologna exemplifies how a mid-sized European city can strategically deploy academic, musical, and civic resources to foster sustainable and inclusive forms of creative tourism.

Santa Fe, one of the oldest cities in the United States, has cultivated a distinctive identity as a creative tourism destination through its rich blend of Native American, Hispanic, and Anglo-American traditions. Recognized as a UNESCO Creative City of Crafts and Folk Arts, Santa Fe offers immersive experiences in pottery, weaving, silverwork, and culinary heritage (UNESCO, 2024b). The city's creative tourism

development is supported by strong partnerships among Indigenous communities, local artisans, museums, and tourism boards, with Visit Santa Fe and the Museum of International Folk Art playing key coordinating roles (Duxbury and Richards, 2019). Santa Fe's approach foregrounds heritage preservation, cultural diversity, and community well-being, illustrating how creative tourism can support intercultural understanding and place-based economic development.

Valparaíso, Chile represents a compelling Latin American example of creative tourism, weaving together music, visual arts, festivals, and community participation. Since its 2019 UNESCO designation as a Creative City of Music, the city has implemented policy efforts to develop music-focused tourism offerings such as urban music festivals, grassroots performances, and structured music heritage routes integrated into cultural branding and visitor engagement strategies (UNESCO, 2024c). Complementing this, Valparaíso is globally recognized for its street art, where hillside neighbourhoods (notably Bellavista, Concepción, and Alegre) have been transformed into open-air art galleries. These areas regularly host guided mural tours, artist-led graffiti workshops, and public art projects rooted in community collaboration (Pinochet Cobos, 2019).

Kanazawa exemplifies how traditional crafts can form the core of a place-based creative tourism strategy in an East Asian context. Known for its centuries-old practices such as gold leaf production, kimono dyeing, and tea ceremonies, Kanazawa has curated experiences that allow tourists to engage directly with artisans in workshops and heritage studios (OECD, 2014; UNESCO, 2025a). Designated as a UNESCO City of Crafts and Folk Arts, the city balances preservation with innovation by supporting intergenerational knowledge transfer and integrating modern design thinking into its creative economy (Duxbury and Richards, 2019). Stakeholders include the municipal government, local craft guilds, tourism offices, and cultural foundations, working together to ensure that creative tourism enhances both cultural sustainability and economic resilience.

Medellín has undergone a remarkable transformation from a city known for violence to a global model of urban innovation and inclusive cultural development. Its creative tourism offerings such as community-led street art tours in Comuna 13, music workshops, and local storytelling highlight the city's commitment to using culture as a tool for reconciliation and social cohesion (Duxbury and Richards, 2019;

OECD, 2014). The city government, through entities like the Medellín Mayor’s Office and Ruta N, supports local entrepreneurs and artists by investing in public art, cultural districts, and inclusive tourism programs. NGOs and community groups have an important role in curating and guiding experiences that are grounded in lived realities, ensuring that creative tourism fosters both visitor engagement and local empowerment (UNESCO, 2025b). As a UNESCO Creative City of Music, Medellín exemplifies how creative tourism can be an engine for both cultural resilience and urban regeneration.

Table 2 provides a comparative overview of the eight best practices discussed above, summarizing key creative assets, stakeholder involvement, and international designations.

Table 2: Comparative summary of creative tourism cities.

City	Region	Creative Strengths	Stakeholders Involved	UNESCO Creative City
Dublin, Ireland	Europe	Literature, storytelling, street art, festivals	City council, artists, tour operators, NGOs	Yes (Literature)
Loulé, Portugal	Europe	Crafts (pottery, weaving, copper), culinary arts	Municipality, artisans, cultural NGOs, universities	No
Barcelona, Spain	Europe	Architecture, design, performing arts, creative hubs	City council, creative clusters, universities, NGOs	Yes (Literature)
Bologna, Italy	Europe	Music, film, literature, university innovation	Municipality, university, cooperatives, creatives	Yes (Music)
Santa Fe, USA	North America	Visual arts, crafts, folk art, gastronomy	Indigenous communities, artisans, museums, tourism board	Yes (Crafts & Folk Arts)

City	Region	Creative Strengths	Stakeholders Involved	UNESCO Creative City
Valparaíso, Chile	Latin America	Street art, poetry, visual arts, heritage architecture	Municipality, local artists, universities, NGOs, tourism sector	Yes (Music)
Kanazawa, Japan	Asia	Traditional crafts (gold leaf, kimono), design, culinary	Craft guilds, municipality, tourism board	Yes (Crafts & Folk Arts)
Medellín, Colombia	Latin America	Street art, music, social innovation, community tourism	Municipality, NGOs, artists, community leaders	Yes (Music)

Source: Author's own compilation based on literature review.

5.4.1. Reflections on emerging themes in creative tourism best practices

The case studies presented above highlight the growing maturity and diversification of creative tourism as a strategic tool for sustainable, place-based development. Despite the geographic, cultural, and political diversity of cities like Dublin, Loulé, Barcelona, Bologna, Santa Fe, Valparaíso, Kanazawa, and Medellín, several converging themes and distinctive approaches emerge: (1) robust multi-stakeholder collaboration that links public policy with grassroots creativity; (2) the central role of artisans and cultural practitioners in shaping experiential, authentic encounters; (3) a careful balance between heritage preservation and contemporary innovation; and (4) the integration of creative tourism into broader development agendas, through urban regeneration, cultural planning, or community empowerment. These patterns collectively highlight the importance of intentional, context-sensitive design that foregrounds cultural expression, fosters social inclusion, and supports long-term sustainability through locally anchored, co-creative tourism models.

Across all cases, multi-level and multi-sectoral stakeholder collaboration is essential to the success and sustainability of creative tourism. Public sector institutions especially municipal governments play a coordinating and enabling role, often through cultural policy, infrastructure support, and funding schemes. Cities such as

Dublin, Loulé, and Bologna illustrate how municipalities can act as catalysts by embedding creative tourism within broader urban development strategies and cultural planning (Duxbury and Richards, 2019; Landry, 2000).

At the same time, local artisans, cultural entrepreneurs, and NGOs serve as content creators and community anchors, ensuring authenticity and grassroots involvement. In Santa Fe, and Kanazawa, traditional artisans are not only service providers but cultural custodians, whose expertise is central to sustaining place identity and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Meanwhile, universities and cultural institutions (notably in Bologna, and Barcelona) contribute research, innovation, and documentation, linking academic knowledge with lived cultural expression.

All cases demonstrate that creative tourism contributes significantly to reinforcing a sense of place, not just for tourists but for local residents. Destinations like Valparaíso and Medellín illustrate how creative tourism can support cultural resilience and urban regeneration in post-conflict or economically challenged contexts. In these cases, street art, music, and storytelling become vehicles for rewriting local narratives, fostering pride, and building social cohesion.

Similarly, cities such as Dublin and Loulé utilize creative practices such as literature, crafts, and workshops as experiential ways of engaging with local identity. These activities allow both residents and visitors to interact meaningfully with the cultural and historical layers of the place, supporting an embodied and emotional sense of belonging (Richards, 2011; Carvalho et al., 2019).

A key theme in these best practices is the dynamic tension between preserving heritage and encouraging innovation. Creative tourism initiatives in Kanazawa, Santa Fe maintains traditional forms of craftsmanship while embedding them in new participatory formats, thereby avoiding museumification. These cities demonstrate that cultural preservation can be adaptive and future-oriented when co-creation, experimentation, and youth engagement are supported.

In Barcelona and Bologna, innovation often stems from urban creativity, maker culture, and new technologies. These cities show how creative tourism can evolve beyond heritage to engage with design, digital arts, and contemporary social movements, while still fostering deep ties to place and community.

UNESCO Creative City designations appear to offer institutional legitimacy, funding opportunities, and international visibility, yet they are not sufficient on their own.

While cities like Dublin, and Santa Fe have leveraged the UNESCO label effectively, non-designated cities such as Loulé also demonstrate that locally driven strategies with strong stakeholder governance can generate similar benefits. Participation in global networks such as the Creative Tourism Network or European Capitals of Culture further facilitates knowledge exchange and benchmarking, contributing to capacity building and innovation.

Many of the cities especially Medellín, and Valparaíso highlight the potential for creative tourism to diversify local economies, empower marginalized groups, and foster social inclusion. These initiatives often link cultural tourism with social justice, using creativity as a vehicle for community development and participatory democracy (OECD, 2014). By contrast, larger cities like Barcelona face the challenge of overtourism, which they seek to address through decentralized, neighborhood-based creative tourism initiatives that reconnect tourism with community life.

These reflections indicate that creative tourism, when grounded in authentic local assets and supported by inclusive governance models, can contribute to sustainable development, cultural continuity, and a deepened sense of place. The best practices reveal that no single formula exists; instead, success lies in the interplay between local specificity, stakeholder collaboration, and adaptive innovation.

6. DESTINATION CONTEXT – BUDAPEST

This chapter examines the urban, socio-cultural, and tourism dynamics that define Budapest as the spatial and experiential context for this study. Since the post-socialist transition, the Hungarian capital has undergone rapid urban transformation, marked by liberalisation of land use, international investment, and the reconfiguration of central neighbourhoods for tourism and consumption. In this broader context, the city's historic Jewish Quarter (District VII) has turned into a small-scale example of urban change, where heritage, nightlife, and local residents' needs often come into conflict.

The chapter begins by situating District VII within the city's post-1990 transformation, tracing how the area's built heritage and availability of underutilised spaces positioned it as a prime site for alternative tourism and urban regeneration. This is followed by a spatial and statistical analysis of overtourism in Budapest, illustrating how tourist density has evolved across scales and particularly intensified in central districts. The subsequent section explores the rise of party tourism as a defining force in District VII's international image and economic structure, revealing its links to infrastructural, policy, and market shifts. The chapter then assesses the multidimensional negative impacts of this tourism model on residents, cultural life, and urban livability.

In response to these challenges, a quieter yet meaningful transformation is underway. The final section introduces the emergent daytime tourism milieu of District VII, highlighting creative tourism practices and cultural offerings that foster place-based engagement and sustainable alternatives. Together, these sections provide a layered understanding of the destination context, revealing both the pressures and possibilities that shape urban tourism development in Budapest.

6.1. Urban transformation and the rise of District VII as a party tourism zone

Following the fall of socialism in 1990, Budapest, like many East-Central European capitals, underwent rapid political, economic, and spatial transformation. The transition from a centrally planned to a market-oriented economy triggered substantial shifts in property ownership, investment patterns, and urban land use. In this context, formerly neglected or underutilised inner-city areas particularly those

with distinctive architectural and historical character became focal points for both domestic and international investors (Smith et al., 2019).

Jewish Quarter emerged as one of the most visible examples of this transformation. Once home to one of the largest Jewish communities in Central Europe, the area was marked by a unique urban morphology of courtyards, narrow streets, and synagogues, but had suffered from decades of neglect and underinvestment. In the post-socialist era, the combination of low real estate prices, central location, and cultural heritage made the district an attractive site for regeneration efforts and entrepreneurial experimentation (Zátori and Smith, 2014).

One of the earliest and most emblematic developments in this regard was the emergence of ruin pubs which are informal bars and cultural spaces established in abandoned buildings, often preserving the decayed aesthetic as part of their unique identity (Zátori and Smith, 2014). Szimpla Kert, founded in the early 2000s, pioneered this trend and quickly became a symbol of the city's post-socialist creative reinvention. Its success inspired the proliferation of similar venues throughout the district, contributing to the area's repositioning as Budapest's alternative nightlife hub (Zátori and Smith, 2014).

Hungary's accession to the European Union in 2004, alongside the expansion of low-cost airlines and the liberalisation of travel markets, significantly increased Budapest's visibility and accessibility as a tourist destination. These factors, combined with the city's relatively low cost of living, contributed to a tourism boom concentrated in central districts (Puczkó et al., 2007; Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019). District VII, with its mix of cultural heritage, emerging nightlife, and dense urban fabric, became a particularly attractive area for younger tourists seeking affordable and immersive experiences.

However, this rapid influx of tourism also brought challenges. The rise of short-term rental platforms, especially Airbnb, significantly altered the housing market and residential composition of the district. Smith et al. (2019) note that District VII saw some of the highest concentrations of Airbnb listings in the city, contributing to the commodification of housing and the displacement of long-term residents. As the district increasingly came to be defined by nightlife and party tourism, concerns about gentrification, noise pollution, and cultural dilution intensified (Dudás et al., 2017).

District VII's transformation into a tourism zone cannot be understood in isolation from broader processes of post-socialist urban change, global tourism flows, and the intersection of heritage commodification with neoliberal redevelopment. The district's trajectory reflects both the opportunities and contradictions inherent in urban revitalisation strategies that rely heavily on tourism as a driver of growth. The following sections examine how these dynamics manifest in the phenomenon of overtourism, the dominance of party tourism, and the emerging alternatives that seek to reshape the district's future.

6.2.Overtourism in Budapest

As Budapest emerged as a leading Central European tourist destination in the 2010s, the rapid growth in visitor numbers brought mounting concerns regarding the sustainability of tourism development. The phenomenon of overtourism has increasingly characterised the city's central districts. These dynamics are especially pronounced in District VII, where the convergence of urban regeneration, short-term rentals, and nightlife infrastructure has amplified both tourism pressures and resident resistance.

Between 2010 and 2019, Hungary experienced a 37.7% increase in national hotel occupancy rates, rising from 31.3% to 43.1% (Pérez Pérez Garrido et al., 2022). At the city level, Budapest recorded an even more significant rise of 41.2%, with hotel occupancy climbing from 40.3% to 56.9% over the same period. Within the city, District VII saw an increase in hotel occupation from 44.2% in 2010 to 55.3% in 2019 representing a 25.1% surge, and positioning it as one of the most heavily visited urban districts (Pérez Pérez Garrido et al., 2022).

In addition to conventional accommodations, the rapid expansion of short-term rentals particularly via platforms like Airbnb has drastically reshaped the tourism landscape. As of 2019, the central districts of Budapest (I, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX) accounted for over 79% of all private accommodation listings in the city. Among them, District VII featured one of the highest densities of Airbnb properties (Pérez Pérez Garrido et al., 2022). This concentration not only facilitated mass tourism flows into compact urban areas but also contributed to rising housing costs, rental volatility, and the gradual displacement of long-term residents.

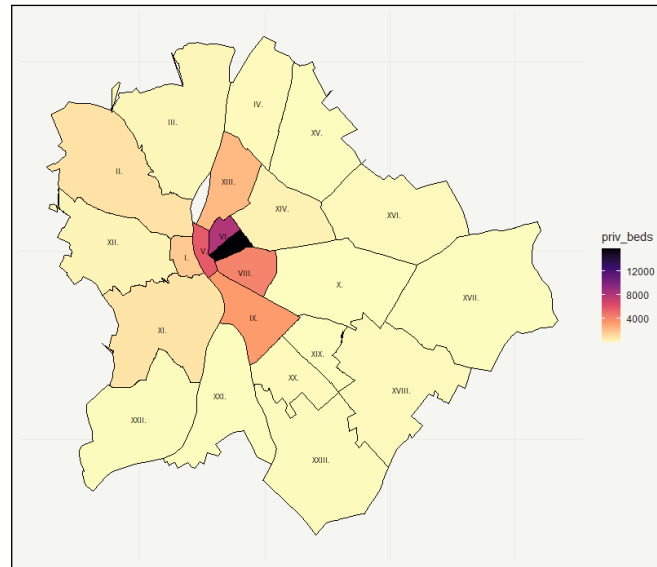


Figure 3: The number of offerings in private accommodation (including Airbnb) by district in 2019.
Source: Pérez Garrido et al., 2022, pp. 11.

The spatial clustering of tourist infrastructure such as restaurants, bars, hostels, souvenir shops, and party venues has reinforced this dynamic, creating a monocultural tourism zone within the Jewish Quarter. Sebrek et al. (2022) argue that the city's tourism policy has historically lacked the holistic vision needed to address such concentration effects, often prioritising growth over balance. The cumulative outcome is a territorialisation of overtourism in Budapest's historic core, with District VII functioning as both a cultural asset and a site of contention.

The COVID-19 pandemic briefly interrupted these trajectories, exposing the vulnerability of tourism-dependent districts and prompting renewed debates about resilience and diversification. However, as tourism returns to pre-pandemic levels, the structural patterns of overtourism remain largely intact. Recent scholarship advocates for more sustainable tourism governance frameworks that decentralise visitor flows, integrate local perspectives, and preserve urban livability (Sebrek et al., 2022; Pinke-Sziva et al., 2020).

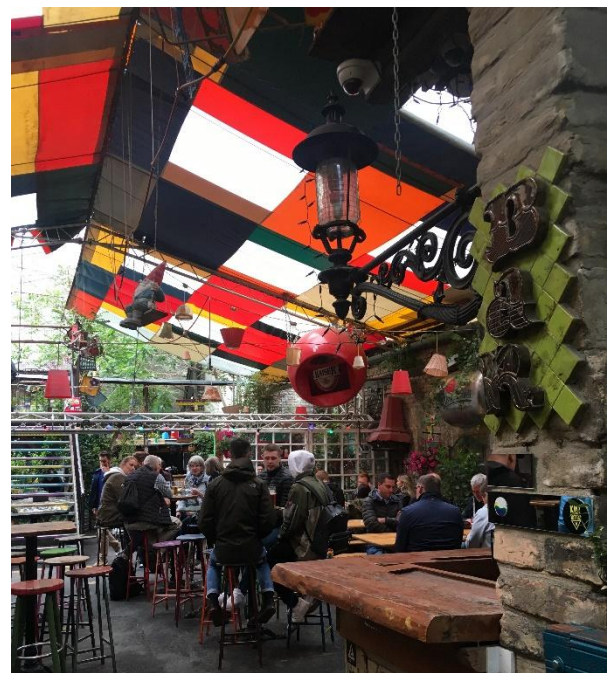
In this context, District VII stands as both a cautionary tale and a testing ground for alternative tourism imaginaries. The following section explores how party tourism became the dominant narrative within this landscape, and how it reinforced the very dynamics that overtourism critiques seek to address.

6.3. Rise of party tourism

The inception of "ruin pubs," starting with Szimpla Kert in the early 2000s, marked a significant evolution in Budapest's nightlife. These establishments, arising from the adaptive reuse of derelict urban spaces, became central to the city's nighttime economy (Zátori and Smith, 2014). The availability of cheap alcohol and entertainment options significantly contributed to Budapest's allure as a party destination. Budget airlines and online platforms often highlighted the low cost of living and partying in Budapest, making it a favoured choice among tourists looking for an affordable yet exhilarating nightlife experience (Puczkó et al., 2007). From 2009, cheap(er) entertainment opportunities, parties and the growing reputation of ruin bars were tourists' main motivations (Smith et al., 2021). Owing to Szimpla Kert's popularity, many other ruin bars mushroomed over the years (Zátori and Smith, 2014).



(a)



(b)

Figure 4: Pictures of the Szimpla Kert taken in 2019. (a) The exterior architecture of the (b) The inner terrace of the Szimpla Kert.

Source: Gábor Michalkó's working group, 2019.

Hungary's EU accession in 2004 further enhanced Budapest's accessibility and appeal as a tourist destination. This development, alongside the advent of low-cost airlines, significantly increased international visitor numbers (Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019; Puczkó et al., 2007). Introducing low-cost carriers transformed Budapest into

an easily accessible destination, particularly for the youth demographic. This change, coupled with the city's affordability, positioned Budapest as an attractive option for those seeking nightlife and leisure, thus fueling the growth of party tourism (Smith et al., 2021).



Figure 5: The interior corridor of the Szimpla Kert.
Source: Csipke, Z, 2020 - Alamy. [online] www.alamy.com.

The rise of Airbnb and similar platforms has transformed the accommodation landscape in Budapest, particularly in nightlife-centric areas like District VII. While these platforms facilitated the influx of party tourists by offering convenient lodging options, they also intensified challenges related to noise, congestion, and community disturbances (Smith et al., 2019). Furthermore, Smith et al. (2019) discuss that the ruin bar phenomenon and the density of Airbnb accommodation are related since most of the Airbnb accommodation is located in District 7 (Dudás et al., 2017). The concentration of Airbnb caused a rise in the number of non-cultural tourists in the city centre, which gave rise to the image of this area as a party zone (Smith et al., 2019).

In marketing and branding, the absence of a unified marketing strategy led to an ambiguous brand image (Puczkó et al., 2007; Smith and Puczkó, 2010). Expanding on the media portrayal of Budapest, it is clear that the city's affordability, especially

regarding alcoholic beverages, plays a crucial role in its appeal. According to a Telegraph article from May 26, 2015, Budapest is highlighted as the cheapest European city for alcoholic drinks, making it an appealing destination for tourists looking to enjoy the nightlife without spending much money (Mills, 2016). This affordability is further evidenced by beer prices in the city, where a pint of local beer in many bars or pubs is priced around 500-600 HUF (approximately €1.5-2), as noted by liveadventuretravel.com from Nov 16, 2023, highlighting the city's appeal to budget-conscious travellers seeking a vibrant nightlife experience (*Is Budapest Cheap? - A 2024 Cost Breakdown*, 2023)).

Moreover, the Budapest Business Journal (BBJ) reports that in 2020, Hungary had the lowest price level of alcoholic drinks (spirits, wine, and beer) among EU Member States, based on the data released by Eurostat (*Hungarian alcohol prices lowest in EU – BBJ*, 2021). This distinction significantly attracts more tourists, particularly those interested in enjoying alcoholic beverages at more affordable prices, further cementing Budapest's status as a premier destination for nightlife enthusiasts.

Party tourism have become not only a significant contributor to the local economy but also a defining narrative in the district's urban branding. However, this development has come at a cost. The nightlife-oriented tourism model has exacerbated issues of noise, vandalism, and public intoxication. It has also contributed to the displacement of local communities and the erasure of everyday urban life (Olt et al., 2019). With ruin bars operating as both cultural icons and commercial engines, District VII increasingly faces the paradox of being over-valorised for its authenticity while losing the very characteristics that made it appealing.

The next section addresses these negative consequences in greater detail, analysing how party tourism has transformed the district's socio-cultural fabric, environmental conditions, and liveability for residents.

6.4. Negative impacts of party tourism

Even though Budapest is one of the popular cities with a dynamically rising tourism flow due to its ruin bars, the increasing practice of nightlife and tourist activities has resulted in congestion and unpleasant consequences of drinking and partying (Smith et al., 2019). This increase imposes several difficulties on the local population.

Olt et al. (2019) examine how the proliferation of tourism in District 7 has contributed to gentrification, with rising property prices and changing demographics pushing out long-term residents. While revitalising certain areas, this urban transformation has led to socio-economic disparities and cultural homogenisation, raising concerns about the sustainability of such development patterns. The authors advocate for regulatory measures and policy interventions to balance tourism growth with urban livability.

Regarding socio-economic challenges, the influx of tourists attracted by the nightlife and ruin pubs has escalated property prices and living costs, making it difficult for residents to afford housing in their neighbourhoods and changing demographics pushing out long-term residents (Olt et al., 2019). This economic displacement is compounded by transforming community services to cater to tourists, often at the expense of local needs. The loss of local businesses, replaced by souvenir shops and short-term rental properties, further erodes the social fabric of communities, leading to a diminished quality of life for residents (Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019).

Cultural degradation is a critical issue associated with party tourism in Budapest. The commodification of local culture and heritage for tourist consumption has led to the erosion of authentic cultural expressions and traditions. While initially celebrated for novelty, the proliferation of ruin pubs and similar establishments has contributed to a homogenised nightlife culture that prioritises the tourist experience over cultural preservation. This cultural shift threatens the intangible cultural heritage of Budapest, showing the need for cultural conservation efforts that protect and promote the city's unique identity (Olt et al., 2019).

The environmental impact of party tourism in Budapest is another significant concern. The concentration of activities in certain parts of the city has led to problems such as littering, vandalism, and more waste generation, putting a strain on the city's infrastructure and natural resources. Noise pollution from nightlife venues disrupts the tranquillity of residential areas, affecting the well-being of inhabitants. These environmental issues detract from the city's livability and pose long-term sustainability challenges that require urgent attention and action (Smith et al., 2019). Pinke-Sziva et al. (2020) discuss innovative strategies for managing party tourism, including developing alternative attractions and implementing visitor management techniques to disperse tourist flows. These strategies aim to reduce pressure on

hotspots like District 7 and promote a more balanced distribution of tourism benefits across the city.

The increase in party tourism in Budapest has also escalated safety and crime-related issues, with heightened cases of petty crimes such as pickpocketing and public intoxication troubling both locals and tourists (Smith et al., 2019). This influx of nighttime tourists has not only elevated the risk of crimes but also strained the local law enforcement's ability to ensure public safety, creating a sense of insecurity among residents (Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019). Addressing these challenges necessitates a concerted effort from local authorities, tourism stakeholders, and the community to implement effective crime prevention strategies and foster a safer environment for all (Smith et al., 2019).

Pinke-Sziva et al. (2019) highlight residents' concerns about noise, litter, safety and the loss of community spaces to tourism-related businesses. Surveys indicate a growing sentiment among residents that their needs and quality of life are being overlooked in favour of tourist entertainment (Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019). The phenomenon of overtourism has not only impacted Budapest's infrastructure but has also stirred resident resistance as locals grapple with the diminishing quality of life. Smith et al. (2019) explore this resistance, noting that the saturation of tourists, especially in the nighttime economy, has sparked significant discontent among residents. Their work highlights the social implications of overtourism, including increased crime rates and a general sense of community displacement. The study calls for more inclusive urban planning and tourism management practices that consider the needs and perspectives of residents.

6.5. The daytime tourism milieu and the emergent creative landscape in Budapest's Jewish Quarter

The Jewish Quarter in District VII, long associated with Budapest's vibrant nightlife and ruin bar culture, is also witnessing the gradual emergence of a distinct daytime tourism milieu. This evolving landscape reflects a counter-narrative to party tourism, emphasizing slower rhythms, creative engagement, and culturally rooted experiences. While these developments remain nascent and fragmented, they signal the potential for a more balanced and sustainable tourism model anchored in local heritage and community life.

During daylight hours, the district's unique spatial morphology such as its labyrinthine streets, courtyards, and historic façades invites exploratory, sensory-rich encounters. This setting supports an expanding ecology of third-wave cafés, artisanal shops, street art, and micro-cultural venues that engage tourists in more intimate, place-based experiences. Murals created by collectives like Neopaint, often referencing historical figures or Hungarian literary icons, have transformed the area's neglected firewalls into a living urban gallery. These interventions contribute not only to visual enrichment but also to collective memory and urban storytelling (Young, 1993).

Independent cultural and commercial spaces such as Printa, which is a hybrid café, screen printing studio, gallery, and eco-conscious shop, serve as anchor points in this emerging creative milieu. Located on Rumbach Sebestyén Street, Printa curates locally inspired design objects and hosts workshops that invite participation, thus embodying the experiential ethos of creative tourism (Richards and Raymond, 2000; Bellini and Pasquinelli, 2016). Such spaces offer an alternative to consumption-driven tourism by encouraging slow interaction and cultural immersion, aligning with global trends in experiential and responsible travel.

Culinary tourism also plays a key role in this diurnal transformation. Food walks, Jewish cuisine tours, and locally oriented gastronomic events foreground taste as a sensorial medium for heritage engagement (Long, 2010; Bessière, 2013). Another good example is the Szimpla Farmers' Market, held on Sunday mornings in the iconic ruin bar. This weekly event repurposes a nighttime venue into a lively community space offering organic produce, artisanal goods, live acoustic music, and brunch made from local ingredients. Such temporal reconfigurations of space allow for convivial tourism that fosters interaction and co-presence between residents and visitors.

Despite its promise, the daytime creative tourism landscape in the Jewish Quarter is still underdeveloped and lacks strategic coordination. Many initiatives operate in isolation, without formal support from municipal bodies or integration into broader tourism development plans. However, the presence of artists, independent entrepreneurs, and culturally sensitive visitors opens pathways for participatory placemaking. These bottom-up efforts can foster a renewed sense of belonging, not

only for tourists but for locals seeking to reclaim their neighbourhood from the excesses of party tourism (McCann, 2007; Richards, 2011).

In this context, creative tourism should not be seen only as a niche market, but as a strategy for urban resilience which reactivates public space, supports local economies, and nurtures cultural continuity. When embedded in inclusive planning frameworks and supported by multi-sectoral governance, the Jewish Quarter's daytime milieu holds the potential to recalibrate the district's identity from a consumption-heavy nightlife zone to a more liveable, culturally enriched destination.

6.6. Philosophical analysis of the interactions within Budapest's party district

Ontological situatedness, in the context of Budapest's Jewish Quarter, highlights the notion that individuals and the Quarter itself are inherently situated within a specific context, which can evolve with time. It is not merely people's experiences that transform; the physical environment and buildings, representing the supply side of the tourism milieu, can change, too. Considering the evolution of ruin pubs within the Quarter, initially, these ruin pubs emerged as organic responses to particular historical and economic circumstances in Budapest, where abandoned and decaying buildings were ingeniously repurposed (Zátori and Smith, 2014). This represents their situatedness within the post-socialist and economic conditions of the early 2000s (Smith et al., 2021). However, as tourists and locals engage with the unique ambience, they contribute to altering these spaces' narrative and incite transformations in the physical environment. The increasing popularity of these pubs prompted investments in formerly neglected structures, resulting in renovations to accommodate the surging number of visitors (Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019). The metamorphosis of the physical infrastructure not only mirrors the changing situatedness of people and place but also exemplifies how the elements of the tourism milieu adapt in response to evolving demands, ultimately shaping collective perceptions. Knowledge about this unique district is actively constructed and evolves over time. One notable example lies in the narrative of Budapest's ruin pubs, such as Szimpla Kert. These venues were initially hidden gems, mainly known to locals who frequented them (Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019). However, as international visitors began to explore the Jewish Quarter and experience the distinct atmosphere of these pubs, knowledge about them started to spread. It was no longer limited to word-of-mouth

recommendations but became widely available through travel guides, blogs, and social media (Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019). Immanuel Kant's distinction between a priori and a posteriori knowledge finds relevance in the evolving knowledge about the Jewish Quarter. Initially, when ruin pubs like Szimpla Kert emerged, knowledge about them was essentially a posteriori based on individual experiences and local interactions. These firsthand experiences contributed to gradually constructing knowledge about these unique spaces. However, as international visitors began to explore the district and the ruin pubs, knowledge transitioned to a more a priori state contributing to the collective perceptions. This transition from a posteriori to a priori knowledge aligns with Kant's ideas about the nature of knowledge and highlights the evolution of the Quarter's narrative.



Figure 6: The ambiance of Szimpla Kert, pictures taken in 2020.
Source: Eat Drink KL, 2020. [online] eatdrinkkl.com.

Merleau-Ponty's ideas about perception being fundamentally tied to our bodily experiences can be applied to these establishments' multi-sensory and immersive nature. When visitors enter a ruin pub, they engage with the environment through their senses, from the tactile experience of touching eclectic decorations to the visual appreciation of graffiti art and the auditory engagement with music. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy reminds us that our perception of the world is not just a mental process but one deeply intertwined with our bodily interactions. The diverse ways in which

different visitors interpret the space, emphasising historical, nostalgic, contemporary, or artistic aspects, can also manifest Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the subjectivity of perception. Visitors bring their unique perspectives and embodied experiences into the ruin pubs, influencing how they perceive and engage with the space.



Figure 7: A party scene at Szimpla Kert in 2020.
Source: Noir, N, 2020 - Alamy. [online] www.alamy.com.

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty's concept of the perceptual horizon aligns with visitors' holistic engagement in ruin pubs. The perceptual horizon suggests that individuals initially perceive an environment's collective sensory elements, social interactions, and historical context before breaking down their experience into individual sensations. In ruin pubs, visitors first perceive the overall ambience, the social interactions around them, and the historical context of repurposed buildings. This initial holistic perception contributes to the immersive and engaging experience that ruin pubs offer. Visitors then look into individual sensations, appreciating the historical, nostalgic, contemporary, or artistic elements based on their personal inclinations. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy helps us understand the layered and dynamic nature of the perceptual experience in these spaces.

The rise of ruin pubs in Budapest's Jewish Quarter has been a prominent and transformative phenomenon that has significantly redefined the cultural and social landscape of the district over the years. What began as a grassroots and creative response to the urban decay and abandoned spaces in the area has blossomed into a distinctive and celebrated aspect of the city's identity (Mérai and Kulikov, 2024). These unique establishments have garnered international attention for their eclectic blend of art installations, live music, and vibrant street food (Zátori and Smith, 2014). They have become a magnet for local residents and tourists, offering an experience far removed from the conventional bar or pub scene. The adaptive reuse of these spaces added a layer of creative contemporary culture, where the past and the present coexist in harmony (Mérai and Kulikov, 2024).

However, alongside the popularity and unique charm of the ruin pubs, the growing prominence has brought certain negative aspects to the forefront. As these venues attract larger crowds, especially during the nighttime, concerns have arisen regarding overcrowding, noise pollution, and disturbances to the residential areas of the Jewish Quarter (Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019). This disruption to the neighbourhood's once-tranquil ambience has raised concerns about the quality of life for residents and the balance between the needs of the community and the appeal of these establishments to tourists (Smith et al., 2019). This transformation illustrates how tourism milieu dynamics within a place can evolve over time, influenced by a combination of tourism trends and the community's response to them. It brings to the fore a delicate and often challenging equilibrium between cultural preservation, responsible tourism, and the desire for economic growth that is characteristic of progressive societies. It calls for urban planners, policymakers, and local communities to work collaboratively to find solutions that safeguard the district's authentic spirit while managing its popularity's negative externalities.

In embracing a progressive approach, strategies should focus on sustainability, cultural preservation, local community involvement, and responsible tourism development. By incorporating these elements, the tourism milieu can adapt to changing demands, thus contributing to a sense of place for tourists and locals that is both dynamic and enhanced. This progressive approach highlights fostering a harmonious relationship between the community, tourists, and policymakers. This

inclusivity extends to the diverse elements that make up the supply side of the destination, creating a balanced and dynamic experience (Michalkó et al., 2022).

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

7.1. Philosophical and epistemological positioning

This doctoral dissertation investigates strategies for rebalancing daytime and nighttime tourism in Budapest's 7th District, widely known as the Jewish Quarter. Rather than prescribing technical fixes, the research is grounded in a commitment to cultural sensitivity, community well-being, and the creative potential of urban life. The Jewish Quarter is approached not just as a physical tourism destination but as a layered and contested space of memory, affect, governance, and transformation. This necessitates a methodological approach capable of holding complexity, contradiction, and emergence.

The research is situated within the interpretivist paradigm, drawing upon a constructivist epistemology and critical realist ontology. These interwoven philosophical positions reflect the study's commitment to understanding not only how tourism is experienced and represented but also how deeper structural conditions shape and constrain those experiences (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Charmaz, 2006; Bhaskar, 2008).

Interpretivism frames the study's overall logic: knowledge is understood as socially produced, contextually situated, and shaped through interaction between the researcher and the researched. This orientation supports the use of qualitative methods such as interviews and visual analysis, allowing for depth, nuance, and emergence in exploring how tourism and cultural identity are made sense of within Budapest's rapidly transforming urban landscape (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

From a constructivist standpoint, the research assumes that multiple realities coexist in the urban tourism context. Each actor such as resident, entrepreneur, tourist, policymaker, or cultural worker constructs meaning through lived experience and social interaction. These realities are not reducible to objective facts or general laws but emerge through stories, images, practices, and symbols. As such, the methodological design emphasizes dialogue, openness, and reflexivity, treating research participants as co-producers of meaning (Charmaz, 2006; Schwandt, 2000). In this spirit, elements of Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2006) informed the thematic analysis strategy. While not adopting a full CGT design, the approach to coding especially in the interviews drew from its inductive, iterative,

and meaning-making orientation. This allowed themes to emerge from participant narratives while acknowledging the researcher's role in co-constructing categories through interpretation and reflection. The CGT lens was particularly useful in surfacing latent tensions between institutional aspirations and practical constraints in Phase 2.

At the same time, the study embraces the insights of critical realism (Bhaskar, 2008; Danermark et al., 2019), which holds that while knowledge is constructed, reality exists independently of our descriptions. Phenomena such as gentrification, overtourism, or institutional breakdown are not only subjective perceptions, they are shaped by underlying causal mechanisms including governance structures, political ideologies, and urban planning regimes. This ontological framing enabled the study to move beyond surface narratives and interrogate how symbolic expressions of tourism (e.g., party branding, heritage commodification) are tethered to deeper institutional and socio-economic dynamics (Sayer, 2000).

Together, these paradigms justify the selection of qualitative methods that are both interpretive and diagnostic. Interviews are treated as situated acts of knowledge production, revealing both manifest discourse and submerged structural tensions. Similarly, the photographic material generated in Phase 1 is read not only for its aesthetic or symbolic value but for what it reveals about spatial affect, perceptual hierarchies, and social dissonance in the district's tourism landscape.

Phenomenology provides an additional conceptual lens, particularly in Phase 1, allowing the study to attend to how space is felt, sensed, and inhabited. Through photographs and narratives, the research explores affective registers of overload, disorientation, nostalgia, and alienation, each reflecting the bodily and emotional experience of navigating a tourism-saturated urban milieu (Merleau-Ponty, 2012; Edensor, 2001; Degen and Rose, 2012). The Jewish Quarter is thus explored not just visually, but atmospherically: as a space of density, tension, and symbolic rupture.

The anthropological dimension complements this view by emphasizing symbolic labor, collective memory, and the ritualized production of place. In Phase 2, where cultural institutions and program leaders become the focus, their work is interpreted not only as operational but as symbolic and ethical labor, curating belonging, mediating tensions, and imagining futures for a place fragmented by tourism and contested identities (Hall, 2021; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Duxbury, 2021).

These philosophical commitments are not abstract add-ons. They directly shape how the data are collected, interpreted, and presented. In both phases of research, methods are deployed to generate layered, reflexive, and context-sensitive insights. This ensures that the methodology is not only technically appropriate but epistemologically aligned with the study's overarching aim: to understand tourism not just as economic activity, but as a site of cultural negotiation, symbolic meaning, and lived tension.

7.2. Research design overview

The research adopts a sequential, multi-method qualitative design structured in two interlinked phases: exploratory and explanatory. This design is grounded in the interpretivist, constructivist, and critical realist paradigms outlined in the previous section. Each phase contributes to a cumulative understanding of the tourism milieu in Budapest's 7th District, with the goal of moving from perception and experience to institutional reflection and potential intervention.

To provide a structured overview of the empirical design, the following two tables summarize the core elements of Phase 1 (Exploratory) and Phase 2 (Explanatory) of the study. Each table presents the central research questions, timeline, data collection and analysis strategies, participant profiles, and analytical foci. This tabular representation clarifies the logic of the sequential, multi-method qualitative approach and highlights how each phase contributes to addressing the overarching aims of the research. The first phase focuses on diagnosing the tourism milieu through visual and narrative methods, while the second phase explores institutional reflexivity and cultural strategies in response to tourism-driven urban transformation.

Table 3: Phase 1 research design overview.

Phase 1 - Exploratory Phase					
RQ1. How is the tourism milieu of Budapest's Jewish Quarter currently constructed, perceived, and symbolically represented through the visual practices of tourist-like observers and the experiential accounts of tourism professionals, entrepreneurs, and public-sector stakeholders embedded in the district, and what practical and theoretical possibilities exist for its future repositioning?					
Timeline	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Participants	Analytical Focus	Research Question
April 2021	Photo task with 3 images	Manual inductive coding	85 tourism students (simulated first-time visitors)	Visual-symbolic representations of tourism space	RQ1.1. What recurring visual motifs, spatial elements, and symbolic representations characterize the daytime tourism milieu of the Jewish Quarter, as captured by tourism students simulating first-time visitors?
				Socio-cultural transformation narratives	RQ1.2. How do tourism professionals, business operators, and public-sector actors currently describe the socio-cultural transformations underway in the Jewish Quarter?
Autumn 2021	Semi-structured interviews	Inductive thematic analysis (NVivo 15)	10 tourism stakeholders (entrepreneurs, professionals, public-sector actors)	Tensions between development and community identity	RQ1.3. What short- and long-term tensions do these stakeholders identify between tourism-led economic development and the preservation of local community identity, cultural authenticity, and everyday livability?
				Creative tourism visions and feasibility	RQ1.4. What creative or alternative tourism models do these stakeholders view as feasible or desirable for enhancing the district's sustainability, inclusivity, and cultural distinctiveness?

Table 4: Phase 2 research design overview.

Phase 2 – Explanatory Phase					
RQ2. How do cultural program directors and staff working in municipally supported institutions in District VII interpret and respond to the challenges and opportunities of managing cultural work in a tourism-saturated urban environment?					
Timeline	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Participants	Analytical Focus	Research Question
Jan–Apr 2025	Semi-structured interviews	Inductive thematic analysis (NVivo 15)	4 cultural professionals (program directors and senior staff in public institutions)	Institutional missions and role definitions	RQ2.1. How do these cultural actors currently define their institutional mission and role in shaping urban identity and mitigating tourism-related disruptions within a district dominated by nightlife tourism?
				Governance and operational constraints	RQ2.2. What operational, financial, bureaucratic, or political constraints are described by cultural institutions as limiting their ability to develop community-focused or participatory tourism initiatives?
				Cultural programming as placemaking, mediation, and civic engagement	RQ2.3. In what ways do these actors describe their cultural programming as a form of placemaking, symbolic mediation, or resistance in response to both tourism saturation and civic discontent from local residents?

Phase 1: Exploratory Diagnosis of the Tourism Milieu

The first phase was designed to explore how tourism is perceived, experienced, and symbolized by those directly embedded in or affected by it. It employed two qualitative methods:

1. **Visual Content Analysis** of 255 photographs taken by undergraduate tourism students, simulating the perceptual gaze of visitors. These visual artifacts captured emotional atmospheres, spatial compositions, and symbolic representations of the Jewish Quarter, offering an affective and aesthetic entry point into the district's tourism milieu.
2. **Semi-Structured Interviews** with ten stakeholders including public administrators, tourism professionals, civil society leaders, and entrepreneurs enabled a narrative-based exploration of tourism impacts, place identity, governance dilemmas, and community responses. These interviews surfaced competing and overlapping interpretations of the district, reflecting the plural and contested nature of urban tourism.

This phase was intentionally inductive and open-ended, aligned with the study's epistemological emphasis on emergent meaning. It allowed patterns, contradictions, and symbolic tensions to be identified without being constrained by a priori assumptions. The insights generated formed the conceptual and thematic foundation for Phase 2.

Phase 2: Explanatory Inquiry into Cultural Governance

Building on the diagnostic findings of Phase 1, the second phase adopted a more explanatory lens, turning its focus toward those responsible for shaping the district's cultural responses to tourism. Through in-depth interviews with four cultural professionals working in municipally linked institutions, this phase explored how cultural strategies are imagined, negotiated, and constrained within an environment dominated by market-driven tourism.

The sequential design ensures that the two phases are not isolated, but dialogically related. The visual-symbolic mappings and stakeholder narratives of Phase 1 provided the empirical grounding and thematic focus for the deeper institutional inquiry of Phase 2. Conversely, Phase 2 recontextualized and expanded upon the

emergent patterns of Phase 1, illuminating the conditions of cultural possibility and constraint that structure tourism development in the district.

By combining exploratory and explanatory modes, the research is able to traverse multiple levels of analysis: from everyday experience to institutional strategy, from symbolic meaning to structural constraint. This approach aligns with the study's philosophical commitments to situated knowledge, reflexivity, and the recognition of both agency and structure. The research design balances inductive richness with explanatory depth. It treats tourism not only as a spatial or economic phenomenon, but as a socio-symbolic field that must be interpreted, negotiated, and potentially transformed through culturally grounded strategies.

7.3. Phase 1: Visual content analysis

7.3.1. Rationale

The exploration of the tourism milieu, especially in highly dynamic and symbolically loaded urban contexts such as Budapest's District VII, poses unique methodological challenges. Milieu, by its very nature, encompasses physical, social, sensory, symbolic, and historical layers that intersect in space and time. Traditional tourism research has often relied on interviews and open-ended surveys to approach this complexity (Dernoi, 1991; Erkuş-Öztürk, 2016). However, as Michalkó and Rátz (2006; 2008) argue, visual methodologies offer a kaleidoscopic lens for understanding the lived and perceived qualities of tourism milieus, including their materialities, atmospheres, and the psychosocial dimensions they elicit.

In this research, visual content analysis was applied to better understand the embodied, emotional, and symbolic dimensions of the daytime tourism milieu in Budapest's District VII. This aligns with the phenomenological and constructivist foundations of the study, which emphasize perception, affect, and representation as central to understanding place. While previous studies have overlooked visual methodologies in tourism milieu research, the current study draws from more recent insights emphasizing the analytical value of tourist-generated images (Garrod, 2008; Pan et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2019). Photos function as powerful representations of place, acting both as memory traces and affective expressions. They bridge the gap between intangible atmospheres and concrete spatial configurations, offering an entry point into the sense-making processes of visitors. By examining such content,

the research accesses not only surface aesthetics but also underlying spatial imaginaries that shape how the district is navigated and remembered.

7.3.2. Data collection

The data were collected in April 2021 through a pedagogical-research collaboration at Corvinus University of Budapest. Eighty-five second-year undergraduate tourism students participated in a visual task designed to simulate tourist behavior. Each student was instructed to take three photographs that, in their view, best captured the daytime tourism milieu of Budapest's District VII. The students were asked to explore the area as if they were first-time visitors, without any prior theoretical framing or knowledge of the research purpose. The research zone was geographically delineated to the inner part of District VII.

The fieldwork was conducted over a one-month period. Students were free to move independently and use their own smartphones or cameras. From their full collection, each participant selected three representative images, yielding a total corpus of 255 photographs, each accompanied by metadata: (1) location, (2) a short description, and (3) five hashtags.

7.3.3. Analytical approach

The visual content was analyzed using a multi-step inductive thematic strategy. Unlike automated or software-based methods, the analysis was conducted manually by the researcher, who assumed a neutral, interpretive stance, aligned with the philosophical commitments of the study. The goal was not to impose fixed categories but to allow patterns, themes, and contrasts to emerge organically from the data. This approach mirrors the study's constructivist epistemology, which prioritizes meaning as emergent, situated, and mediated through human perception and experience.

The analysis proceeded in three steps:

1. **Immersive Familiarization:** All 255 photos and their associated texts were reviewed multiple times to gain familiarity and identify preliminary patterns.
2. **Open Coding:** Themes were developed inductively based on visual features, symbolic references, emotional tone, and spatial context. Particular attention was paid to recurring motifs, symbolic juxtapositions, and the co-presence of elements that reveal tensions or synergies in the district's identity.

3. **Refinement of Themes:** The codes were grouped into broader thematic categories that reflected core dimensions of the tourism milieu. Each theme was supported by representative images and quotes from the descriptions.

7.3.4. Researcher's role and reflexivity

In alignment with the interpretivist paradigm, the researcher did not aim for “objective” generalization but rather sought to understand how urban space is perceived, represented, and symbolically constructed through the photographic gaze. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the process. Although the researcher has familiarity with the study area, care was taken to adopt the perspective of a distant yet engaged observer, minimizing interpretive bias. The students' unfiltered images and spontaneous textual associations offered a valuable proxy for external visitor perception.

Importantly, no pre-existing codebook or NVivo software was used. Instead, the analysis relied on manual coding using spreadsheets, allowing direct engagement with each data point. This approach enhanced interpretive sensitivity while maintaining methodological transparency.

7.4. Phase 1: Semi-structured interviews with tourism stakeholders

7.4.1. Rationale and purpose

Complementing the visual analysis, this phase aimed to deepen the exploratory inquiry into how the tourism milieu of Budapest's Jewish Quarter is experienced and interpreted by those embedded in its everyday governance and cultural production. While photographs captured symbolic and sensory layers of place, interviews with tourism stakeholders offered access to strategic, affective, and reflective dimensions of urban change.

The rationale for using semi-structured interviews lies in their balance between flexibility and structure, making them particularly suited for accessing narrative depth, situated knowledge, and emergent themes. Grounded in the interpretivist and constructivist paradigms of the study, interviews were treated as co-constructed events in which meanings are negotiated and revealed, rather than passively reported. This method was essential for understanding how actors across public administration, the private sector, and civil society navigate contradictions, manage

conflicts, and conceptualize possibilities within an overtouristed and contested district. Rather than treating interviewees as data sources, the approach recognized them as positional interpreters of place, each embedded in a particular socio-political and emotional context.

7.4.2. Participant selection and data collection

Ten interviews were conducted with individuals selected through purposive and snowball sampling. The sample included a diverse cross-section of actors involved in or impacted by tourism development in Erzsébetváros: public administrators, tourism experts, entrepreneurs, NGO leaders, and civil society figures.

All interviews were conducted in Hungarian in Autumn 2021 under the umbrella of a national research initiative (TKP project). Each session lasted between 30 and 50 minutes and followed a semi-structured guide designed collaboratively with the research team. The interview themes included:

- The evolution of tourism in District VII
- Perceived impacts of overtourism on community life and urban identity
- Narratives of cultural change and gentrification
- Institutional responses and governance challenges
- Opportunities and constraints for creative, community-based tourism

The participants' anonymized roles are outlined in the following table:

Table 5: Interviewee profiles in Phase 1.

No.	Position
1	Public administration specialist involved in national tourism policy
2	Airbnb owner operating private accommodations in the party zone
3	NGO leader focusing on Budapest's public transport
4	Director of a 4-star hotel in central Budapest
5	Tour guide, author, and tourism educator with decades of experience
6	Former national tourism head, current religious tourism site manager

No.	Position
7	Civil servant responsible for tourism at City Hall since the 1990s
8	National tourism office tourism development manager
9	Jewish restaurant owner in the party district
10	Manager of the Centre for Budapest Development

Source: Author's own work.

This composition ensured a diversity of perspectives across public, private, and third-sector spheres, reflecting the co-produced and contested nature of urban tourism.

7.4.3. Analytical approach

The interviews were transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. To analyze the ten interviews, inductive thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo 15 software. Thematic analysis is a foundational method in qualitative research, known for its adaptability across disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and human geography (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Alahou, 2023). Its flexibility allows it to be used within various paradigms, including constructivist and critical realist frameworks, as appropriate for this study (Kiger and Varpio, 2020).

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step model, the analysis involved:

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

The coding was data-driven and inductive, meaning that no pre-set themes were imposed. This approach allowed patterns and categories to emerge organically, ensuring that findings remained grounded in participants' narratives (Bryman, 2012; Patton, 2015).

The researcher maintained a reflexive position throughout the process, acknowledging their interpretive role while remaining neutral in presentation. NVivo

15 was used to organize and code the transcripts systematically, enhancing transparency, traceability, and depth. While NVivo provided the technical means, the researcher retained full interpretive control, constructing themes that reflect both manifest and latent meanings.

7.4.4. Epistemological and interpretive considerations

Consistent with constructivist and critical realist epistemologies, the interviews were not interpreted as objective truths but as situated, symbolic disclosures. Participants articulated personal and institutional worldviews shaped by structural positions, emotional investments, and historical experience. Analysis was therefore attentive not only to what was said, but to how and why certain narratives were emphasized or omitted.

The researcher maintained reflexivity throughout the process, using analytic memos and peer debriefing to surface positionality and mitigate interpretive bias. NVivo was used to enhance traceability and depth, but interpretive control remained firmly with the researcher.

By placing these interviews in dialogue with the visual content analysis and the conceptual framework, Phase 1 provided a multi-dimensional, exploratory map of the district's tourism dynamics informing the design and focus of Phase 2's explanatory engagement with cultural institutions.

7.5. Phase 2: In-depth interviews with cultural actors

7.5.1. Rationale and purpose

Building on the exploratory insights from Phase 1, Phase 2 adopted an explanatory orientation to investigate the institutional dimensions of cultural co-creation in a tourism-saturated urban context. While the first phase mapped the affective, perceptual, and symbolic contours of the district through stakeholder voices and photographic representations, this phase sought to uncover how cultural meaning is planned, negotiated, and enacted by those operating at the intersection of policy, programming, and community engagement.

The decision to focus on cultural actors was guided by a core proposition of the research: that the Jewish Quarter's tourism challenges cannot be resolved solely through regulatory or infrastructural interventions. Instead, they require symbolic

repair and cultural recalibration, often mediated by institutions and individuals tasked with curating collective narratives, fostering belonging, and staging inclusive public life. As such, cultural institutions are not neutral spaces but active agents of placemaking and meaning production.

This phase approached institutions not as monolithic entities, but as complex sites where values, constraints, and strategic choices intersect. Interviews were designed to elicit institutional reflexivity, surfacing how cultural workers understand their roles, navigate structural pressures, and engage in affective, symbolic, and epistemic labor to sustain meaningful place-based interventions.

7.5.2. Participant selection and data collection

Four cultural professionals were interviewed between January and April 2025. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, based on their leadership roles in prominent, municipally-linked cultural institutions located in Budapest's 7th District. These individuals were directly involved in program design, community outreach, and inter-agency collaboration, providing privileged insight into the practical and ideological terrain of cultural work in the district. As such, they can be considered as authentic representatives of the district's creative cultural life, reflecting both its institutional practices and its broader role in shaping tourism and community narratives.

The interviews were conducted in Hungarian, each lasting 60 to 90 minutes, and were held in person. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated into English by the researcher to ensure fidelity to tone, nuance, and meaning.

The semi-structured interview protocol explored topics such as:

- The mission and ethos of the institution
- Experiences with public engagement, resistance, or apathy
- Collaborations or tensions with tourism authorities and local government
- Perceptions of tourism's impact on cultural programming and identity
- The role of culture in community regeneration and place attachment

Participants were assured anonymity and are referred to using generalized institutional descriptors.

7.5.3. Analytical approach

The data were analyzed through inductive thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework and supported by NVivo 15 software. The analysis focused on extracting conceptual depth, institutional contradictions, and emotional undertones, while maintaining coherence with the study's interpretivist and critical realist foundations.

Steps included:

1. **Immersion** in the data to identify emotional and thematic inflections.
2. **Code generation** emphasizing institutional discourses, strategic narratives, and expressions of constraint or possibility.
3. **Theme development**, attentive to the relational, affective, and symbolic dimensions of institutional practice.
4. **Interpretive synthesis**, drawing connections between participant narratives, the broader tourism milieu, the study's conceptual framework and philosophical positioning.

7.5.4. Epistemological and interpretive considerations

Phase 2 treated cultural actors as epistemic agents, whose everyday work is infused with symbolic interpretation, affective labor, and strategic meaning-making. Their narratives were interpreted not as institutional positions alone, but as situated reflections, shaped by emotional investment, relational tensions, and ethical dilemmas.

Phenomenological concepts informed the reading of place attachments, sensory disruptions, and professional fatigue, while critical realism enabled an examination of the structural and policy environments constraining creative autonomy. Constructivist logic underpinned the recognition that institutional knowledge is not static but performed, negotiated, and contested across scales of action.

This phase revealed how culture is both a resource and a terrain of struggle mobilized to mediate urban tensions, and articulate new imaginaries of belonging. The insights also demonstrated how the promises of creative tourism must contend with real-world constraints, from limited funding and overregulation to the emotional exhaustion of cultural laborers.

Phase 2 provided an explanatory layer to the research, offering a nuanced portrait of institutional reflexivity within an urban landscape marked by tourism intensity, cultural volatility, and socio-political ambiguity. These findings not only illuminated the cultural logic of place governance but also suggested pathways for more empathetic, participatory, and context-sensitive forms of urban tourism planning.

7.6. Ethical Considerations

This research adheres to rigorous ethical standards aligned with qualitative research principles and institutional protocols governing human subjects research. Ethical integrity was maintained across all phases of the study, encompassing participant recruitment, data collection, informed consent, confidentiality, data storage, and interpretive reflexivity.

All participants in both empirical phases were provided with clear, accessible information about the research aims, methodological procedures, and their rights as participants. In Phase 1, recorded verbal consent was obtained prior to each interview. Participants were clearly informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time, refuse to answer any question, or request the deletion of their data without consequence. In Phase 2, similar protocols were followed with cultural professionals, who were also given the opportunity to review anonymized summaries of their interviews prior to final analysis, thus supporting participant validation.

In the case of visual data collection in Phase 1, students involved in the photography exercise were participating in a pedagogical task embedded in a classroom setting. While they were not initially aware of the research purpose to avoid influencing their framing, they were informed retrospectively of the possible academic use of their anonymized content. Only voluntarily submitted and non-identifiable data were used.

Given the potentially sensitive nature of the research topics including gentrification, nightlife regulation, overtourism, and inter-institutional critique, extra precautions were taken to safeguard participant identities. Interviewees were anonymized using role-based pseudonyms (e.g., “Cultural Director”, “Policy Expert”), and all transcripts were de-identified to prevent attribution through context. No specific

names of individuals or institutions appear in the dissertation or any derived publications unless publicly available and already in the public domain.

Audio files and transcripts were stored on encrypted, password-protected devices accessible only to the primary researcher. The handling of all personal and sensitive data complied with GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) standards applicable within the European research area.

8. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study, structured in two phases aligned with the research design. Each phase builds on the previous to offer a layered understanding of the tourism dynamics in Budapest's District VII, commonly known as the Jewish Quarter.

Phase 1 adopts an exploratory lens to investigate how the district is perceived and experienced by various tourism stakeholders and visitors. Drawing on visual content analysis and semi-structured interviews, this phase identifies key themes related to identity, urban transformation, and sensory experience within the tourism milieu.

Phase 2 deepens the inquiry by engaging with cultural professionals responsible for program development and institutional strategy. This explanatory phase focuses on how culture is mobilized and negotiated within a tourism-saturated environment, revealing the operational, emotional, and symbolic constraints faced by those attempting to foster alternative forms of urban engagement.

Together, these findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of place-making, institutional reflexivity, and the contested nature of tourism-led urban change. The next sections detail the thematic insights from each phase.

8.1. Phase 1: Exploring the tourism milieu through visual and narrative perception

Phase 1 investigates how the tourism dynamics of District VII are experienced, represented, and contested through both visual and narrative forms. Drawing on visual content produced by tourism students and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, this phase uncovers how the district's evolving identity is shaped by tensions between heritage, nightlife, gentrification, and local life. The analysis surfaces recurring motifs, emotional undercurrents, and symbolic markers that together reveal the layered and often conflicting perceptions of the area. These findings serve as a diagnostic foundation for understanding the socio-cultural pressures that inform the subsequent inquiry into institutional responses.

8.1.1. Visual perception

The visual content analysis undertaken in Phase 1 of the study serves as an epistemological and affective inquiry into how visitors come to know and represent

Budapest's District 7. Through 255 photographs submitted by Hungarian tourism students, paired with hashtags and micro-narratives, the analysis reveals how urban atmospheres, cultural memory, and spatial affordances are rendered visible, meaningful, and desirable. As such, the photographic corpus constitutes not just data but an embodied epistemic practice of seeing and situating the city as a lived and imagined destination.

From a phenomenological standpoint, the photographs offer insight into how place is sensed and remembered, and how visual motifs such as graffiti, courtyards, ruin facades, and trams index not only urban form but the affective atmospheres that accompany it. These images frame experience through a perceptual lens: attention is directed toward decay and repurposing, between religious gravity and informal vibrancy. The ruin bar, for instance, emerges not merely as an entertainment venue but as a symbolic convergence of post-socialist nostalgia, youth culture, and creative appropriation. This layered imagery supports the idea that tourism milieu is formed not through icons alone, but through textures, contradictions, and visual juxtapositions.

Regarding the demographic characteristics of the participants, there was no precise criteria of involvement in the research. However, in terms of gender, 75% of participants were female; and 25% of participants were male. All the participants belong to generation Z and were born in Hungary between 1997-2002.

Figure 8 shows the location of the photographed venues. The location of the photos concentrated in the so-called "Jewish Ghetto". 19% of the photos were taken in Kazinczy Street, where of Szimpla Garden and Budapest's Art Nouveau Orthodox Synagogue are located. 39% of the photos taken in Kazinczy Street were of Szimpla Garden; however, only 4% of the photos taken in Kazinczy Street were about the Art Nouveau Orthodox Synagogue. On the other hand, 15% of the total photos were taken in Dohany Street, where the Great Synagogue of Budapest is located. This building is the largest synagogue in Europe and is also known as the "Tabakgasse" Synagogue. 10% of the photos were taken in Kiraly Street and 9% of the photos were taken in Gozsdu Courtyard, which is a lively and colourful venue with coffee houses, restaurants, and bars. 7% of the photos were taken in Dob Street, which offers special architecture and firewall paintings. The remaining 40% of the photos were from 23

different locations including streets, squares and boulevards located in the Jewish quarter.

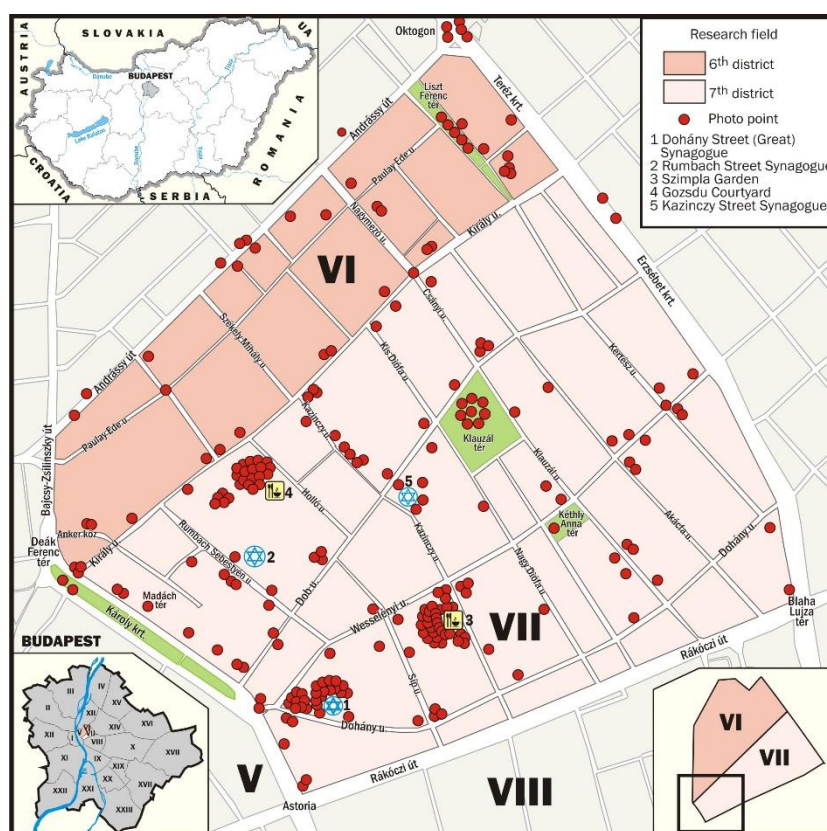


Figure 8: Location of photos taken in Budapest's party zone.
Source: Michalkó, Bal, and Erdélyi, 2022, pp. 7.

The key thematic components derived from the manual photo coding are summarized in Table 6, which outlines the categories, sub-categories, descriptions, and relative proportions of visual content representing the daytime tourism milieu of District 7.

Table 6: Key thematic components derived from the manual photo coding.

Category	Sub-Category	Description	% of Total Photos
Primary Contributors	Built Environment	Ruined façades, courtyards,	22%

Category	Sub-Category	Description	% of Total Photos
		architectural hybridity (e.g., parks in squares)	
	Cultural Resources		34%
	— Creative Art	Street art, graffiti, murals, sculptures, street music	21%
	— Jewish Heritage	Synagogues (Dohány, Kazinczy, Rumbach), plaques, memorials	13%
	Social Resources	Community interaction, local gatherings, benches, informal encounters	2%
Secondary Contributors	Entertainment		31%
	— Catering	Outdoor cafés, food courts, brunch spots	11%
	— Pubs/Ruin Bars	Especially Szimpla Kert (7%), Gozsdu Udvar (9%)	20%
	Transportation	Trams, metro entrances, rental bikes	6%
	Accommodation	Hostels, hotels, Airbnb signage (e.g., Arkad Bazar Hostel)	2%

Category	Sub-Category	Description	% of Total Photos
	Supplementary Services	Souvenirs, bike tours	2%
Negative Elements	Waste and Dirt	Rubbish bins, street litter	2%

Source: Author's own work.

The photos are categorized as primary and secondary contributors of the daytime tourism milieu of District 7, except for the negative photos, which make up 2% of the photos. These negative photos were of rubbish bins and dirt in the streets. Primary contributors represent originally existing assets for non-tourism purposes, while secondary contributors represent assets intentionally built for the purposes of tourism.

As demonstrated in the Figure 9, primary contributors made up 58% of the photos, and comprised 3 sub-categories: built environment, cultural resources and social resources. Dilapidated buildings, the 'ruin' character of the architecture in the area, courtyards of the old buildings and built hybrids such as parks in a square were in the focus of built environment photos, which totalled 22% of the total photos. Cultural resources had a share of 34% of the total photos and had 2 sub-sub-categories: creative art and Jewish heritage. Street art, street music, and sculptures in street settings formed the creative art sub-category, which comprises 21% of the total photos. It is important to point out that 90% of the creative art photos were of firewall paintings and graffiti art. One could interpret this as a means of street art bringing creativity into the 'ruined' setting of the Jewish quarter. The so-called Jewish triangle of Budapest (Budapest Great Synagogue located in Dohany Street, the Art Nouveau Orthodox Synagogue located in Kazinczy Street, and the Rumbach Street Synagogue) created the Jewish heritage sub-sub-category, which forms 13% of the total photos. 88% of the Jewish Heritage photos were of the Budapest Great Synagogue. Photos that highlighted community and social interactions formed a sub-category: social resources within the so-called primary contributors comprised 2% of the total photos.

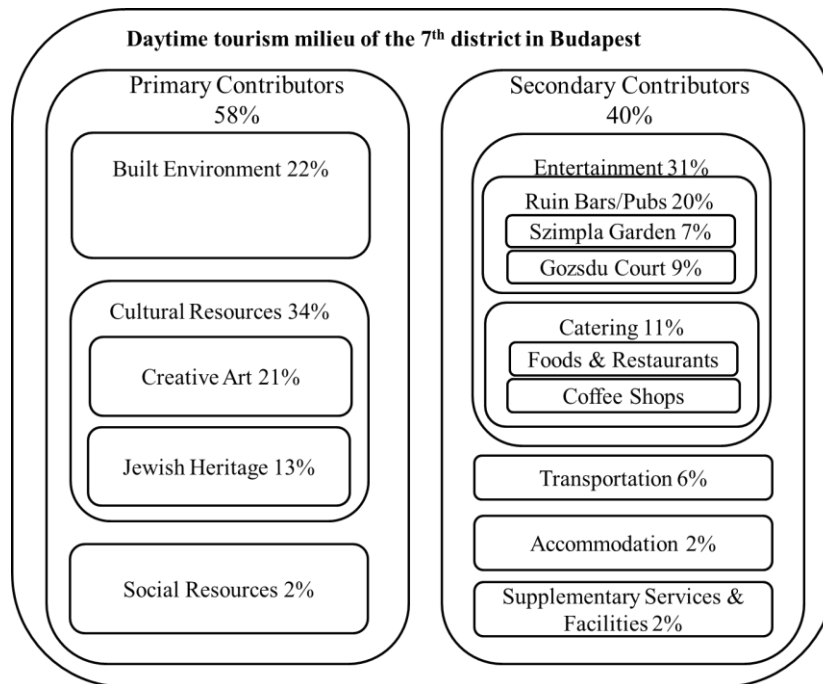


Figure 9: Daytime tourism milieu components of Budapest's party zone.
Source: Michalkó, Bal, and Erdélyi, 2022, pp. 8.

The secondary contributors made up 40% of the photos, and had 4 sub-categories: entertainment, transportation, accommodation, as well as supplementary services and facilities. The entertainment sub-category had a share of 31% of the photos. Images showing catering formed 11% of the total photos, while pubs/ruin bars had 20% of the total photos. This suggests an unbalance between the catering and ruin bars/pubs sub-sub-categories of entertainment, which caused overcrowding in night-time economy. 38% of the ruin bar/pub photos were taken in Szimpla Garden, which makes up 7% of the total photos; and 48% of the ruin bars/pubs photos were taken in Gozsdu Court, which makes up 9% of the total photos.



Figure 10: Main components of daytime tourism milieu in Budapest's party zone.

Upper left: Dohany Street Synagogue; lower left: Gozsdu Court as an iconic gastronomic place; right: street art on fire walls.

Source: Source: Michalkó, Bal, and Erdélyi, 2022, pp. 9.

Photos of traffic culture, i.e. old-type yellow trams and old metro stations formed the transportation sub-category, which had a 6% share in the total photos. The accommodation sub-category was composed of hotel and hostel photos, and accounted for 2% of the total photos. 80% of the accommodation photos captured Arkad Bazar Hostel, which has varied architecture composed of socialist and old ruined styles, and is located in Dohany Street. Souvenirs and guided bike tour photos generated the supplementary services and facilities sub-category, which had a share 2% of the total photos.

These results suggest that visitors (albeit simulated ones) perceive the essence of the district not through its curated or commodified tourism infrastructure, but through its existing material and symbolic landscape. The heavy presence of the built environment category, with its focus on ruin facades, courtyards, and urban hybridity, indicates a strong attraction to textures of decay, authenticity, and layered histories. These motifs evoke an aesthetic of urban fragmentation and imperfection about what might be called a “tourism of textures”. This resonates with broader global trends toward post-industrial tourism imaginaries. From a phenomenological view, it suggests that space is experienced not just as geometry but as ambience, encoded with memory, time, and transformation.

The largest thematic block, cultural resources, further validates this claim. Within this, creative art stands out, dominated by graffiti, murals, and other street-level expressions. That 90% of these creative art images feature firewall paintings and graffiti underlines how the vernacular and the spontaneous are prioritized over institutional or formal culture. Jewish heritage (13%), while less dominant, reveals a spatial and symbolic layering where sacred and profane co-exist. The fact that most Jewish heritage photos depict the Dohany Street Synagogue, while other synagogues are visually marginalized, opens questions about visibility, narrative hierarchy, and spatial remembering in the district's symbolic economy.

In contrast, the secondary contributors especially entertainment highlight the shift from cultural heritage to consumption-driven tourism. The imbalance between catering and pubs/ruin bars visually captures the dominance of nightlife narratives in District 7. This supports concerns about the district's transformation into a nightlife enclave at the expense of its historic and residential character. Interestingly, despite being photographed during daytime hours, ruin bars still emerged as dominant motifs, suggesting their symbolic hold transcends their temporal function. The presence of ruin bars in 20% of all photos and in 48% of entertainment-tagged photos points to their status as icons of youth culture, post-socialist creativity, and experiential tourism.

With the help of the text-driven approach of the topic model, another technique of classification is evolved: this emerged from the collection of texts as a whole through computation. 255 textual descriptions of photos were used as input. According to common practice used in computational text analysis, in order to find the roots of words, before identifying the word basket of the text, a few steps had to be made to formally combine words belonging to each other in an expression. 5011 words were found in the text. Topic models assume that people who provide descriptions of photos have a word set, so-called topics in their mind. These topics are the motifs that appear in the analysed texts, so these are the words which describe the images the most extensively. A combined text consisting of the descriptions of photos provides information on the distribution of topics. Photos can be described with the help of these motifs, called topics. Before this procedure starts, data have to be "cleaned". After that the identification of the words follows: this gives the best description of the motifs; this way the topic model of the data is created. It was found that the best description needs 13 to 18 topics. Based on the evaluation, 16 topics were selected as optimal for this dataset. After choosing the optimal number of topics, the distribution of the topics was calculated in the case of the

descriptions. The probability of the best 10 words for each topic was observed; and, depending on these words, the topics were characterised by tagging them with names and themes.

To get a simple structure of the context, an allocation of the themes of the framework was done with the help of a selection of a word set. These words, i.e. key themes, characterise what Budapest's 7th District means for visitors. The topics in the photo descriptions are the following: built environment, creative arts, historical heritage, attraction, crowd, originality, ruin bars, music, entertainment, street food, restaurants and coffee shops, accessibility, accommodation, atmosphere, experience, leisure. Interestingly, the top five terms in each topic had a probability ranging from 0.1 to 0.13. As topic modelling is a "bag of words" method, the order of these words is not significant.

The frequency analysis of 1275 hashtags attached to the photos shows a wide range of words and expressions. "Budapest" was detected 53 times, the second most often used hashtag "street art" was mentioned 19 times, to be followed by "synagogue" and "ruin bar" 18 times, and "architecture" 17 times.

Topic models show that the characteristics and themes of the descriptions of the photos are similar to what was found based on the visual content analyses. The combination of computational and qualitative methods produces a coding that exhibits topics and central themes of pictures; these topics and central themes, in turn, illustrate the daytime characteristics of the locations under scrutiny. Coding procedure of the combination of computational and qualitative methods forms three pillars of themes: historical heritage; creative art and design; and entertainment. Both the visual content analysis of the photos and the computational analysis of their descriptions yield main themes: historical heritage, built environment, creative arts, street food, restaurants and coffee shops, experience; these are reflected in the hashtags as well. Primary and secondary contributors are in balance, as shown by the visual content analysis of the photos. Themes determined on the basis of both photo analysis and topic modelling partly describe interior and partly exterior environments. Surprisingly, contrasts have also been detected: such contrasts include street food and fine dining, street art and museums, old buildings and new buildings, crowds and tranquillity, etc., giving the descriptions originality. Besides entertainment, this area has many facilities and a unique ambience, and it is rich in attractions for daytime tourism.

Altogether, the findings suggest that District 7 operates as a palimpsest which is a layered space where histories, subcultures, commercialism, and informal expressions coexist. This layered quality is precisely what gives the milieu its epistemic and aesthetic richness. The results do not just describe what the students photographed, but reveal how urban space is interpreted and emotionally navigated, thus highlighting the central argument of the dissertation: that urban tourism milieus must be understood through their symbolic, affective, and interpretive dimensions, not just their economic or infrastructural features.

8.1.2. Narrative Perception

The following section outlines the main themes that emerged from the expert interviews, offering insights into how professionals working in or around District 7 perceive the area's transformation through tourism. Rather than imposing a predefined structure, the analysis allowed themes to surface from the material itself, shaped by the experts' language, concerns, and narratives. What emerged is a layered picture of the district shaped by memory, aesthetics, planning tensions, and everyday urban life. These findings reflect how actors make sense of place, and how this sense is tied to broader questions of identity, policy, and change. The themes are presented along with selected translated quotations, and reflections are woven throughout to connect these perspectives with the conceptual grounding of the dissertation, particularly its focus on creative tourism and the spatial, epistemological, and affective dimensions of urban experience.

The table below summarises the nine themes identified through the inductive thematic analysis, alongside their associated sub-themes, condensed codes, and the frequency of reference across the ten expert interviews. This synthesis provides an at-a-glance overview of the key discursive patterns that emerged, offering a foundation for the more detailed thematic discussion that follows.

Table 7: Themes identified through the inductive thematic analysis - Phase 1.

Theme	Sub-theme	Code (Shortened)	Frequency
Urban Identity of Budapest	Physical & Geographic Features	Danube, walkability, layout, architecture	9
	Cultural/Historic Identity	Monarchy heritage, Jewish quarter, festivals	8

Perception of Appeal	Livability & Accessibility	Public transport, ease of movement, green spaces	6
	City Charm	Aesthetic appeal, alternative & youthful atmosphere	6
Drivers of Tourism	Global Trends & Budget Travel	Low-cost airlines, global middle class travel	6
	Local Attractions	Ruin pubs, culture, affordability	7
Party District Impacts	Noise, Behavior, Cleanliness	Complaints of noise, dirt, stag parties, drugs, public toilets	16
	Calls for Zoning/Planning	Pedestrian zones, traffic regulation, licensing	8
Media & Perception	Press Narratives	Media exaggeration of overtourism	4
	Expert Discourse	Professional articles, alarmist reports	3
Governance & Regulation	Policy Fragmentation	District vs. city vs. national tensions	8
	Lack of Enforcement	Weak rules, limited coordination	5
	Suggested Interventions	Strategic plans, licensing, public safety	6
Domestic Tourism	Accessibility Barriers	Affordability issues, price mismatches	9
	Lack of Offers/Programs	Few packages for locals, limited youth engagement	6
Post-COVID Recovery	Impact on Tourism Economy	Business closures, unemployment, decreased demand	6
	Future Outlook	Gradual recovery, optimism, innovation needed	5

Cultural Tourism Potential	Missed Opportunities	Underused heritage sites, limited cultural programming	4
	Suggested Improvements	Classical music, boutique shops, festivals	4

Source: Author's own work.

Theme 1: Urban Identity of Budapest

Budapest's urban identity emerged as a multidimensional construct articulated through sensory perception, spatial intimacy, and layered historical narratives. Across the interviews, participants drew on embodied and symbolic vocabularies to describe how the city is experienced, not just seen which is a mode of knowing that resonates with a phenomenological and anthropological orientation. Such narratives reject essentialist definitions of identity and instead foreground a dynamic, affective, and situated understanding of place. This reflects the study's epistemological stance that knowledge is partial, embodied, and constituted through lived encounters.

The Danube was frequently positioned as a structuring and symbolic force in the city's identity. Participants described the river not merely as a geographical feature, but as an experiential anchor.

"The Danube is beautiful, the riverbanks are stunning... the city's position is extraordinary" (Expert 10).

Another expert remarked,

"What makes Budapest special is both the natural and built environment—how the Danube cuts through the city" (Expert 5).

These expressions capture how spatial features are imbued with aesthetic and emotional meaning where perception emerges from movement and emplacement. The river becomes not only an object of visual consumption but a medium of orientation and symbolic cohesion.

This spatial legibility was complemented by the city's walkable scale, which experts repeatedly cited as a core aspect of Budapest's appeal.

"It is a walkable city. Not too large, not too small." (Expert 1).

"It's more comfortable for tourists when they can explore a city center on foot and constantly see interesting things." (Expert 6).

Such reflections position the city as a space of intimate mobility, where the act of walking enables affective, interpretive, and unmediated engagements with place. These insights affirm a relational ontology of tourism, where meaning is generated not through detached observation but through embodied co-presence.

From this perspective, walkability is not simply a logistical convenience but a condition for what this research identifies as creative tourism: the possibility for deeper, slower, and participatory experiences of place. The physical affordances of the city such as its density, coherence, and rhythm facilitate a mode of tourism grounded in exploration, interpretation, and imagination, rather than passive spectacle. This supports theoretical arguments that mid-sized cities, such as Budapest, offer the ideal spatial and symbolic conditions for creative and dialogical tourism practices.

The material environment also communicates identity through its historical layering. Experts frequently referenced the legacy of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the preservation of fin-de-siècle architecture, and the evolution of neighborhoods such as Erzsébetváros and the Jewish Quarter.

“The connection to the Monarchy and the Austro-Hungarian relationship contributed enormously to our culture.” (Expert 10).

“The Jewish Quarter and the Erzsébetváros area have completely transformed and become unique.” (Expert 5).

These reflections echo the concept of the urban palimpsest, where overlapping temporalities are embedded in the built environment and encountered through narrative, memory, and atmosphere. Such spaces invite layered readings supporting a tourism imaginary that values ambiguity, authenticity, and co-constructed meaning. Yet these same sites were described as increasingly vulnerable to overexposure and commodification.

“There are hardly any locals left in the Jewish Quarter; it’s all tourists now.” (Expert 9).

“Király Street has completely lost its original character” (Expert 5).

These observations illustrate how tourism may dislocate rather than anchor urban identity, particularly when development prioritizes market logics over everyday life. From a critical-epistemological standpoint, such accounts challenge celebratory

narratives of urban revitalisation and reveal the tensions between creative reuse and extractive tourism. The displacement of local residents and reconfiguration of cultural space raise questions about agency, representation, and the ownership of meaning which is a central concern in anthropological approaches to place-making. The findings suggest that Budapest's urban identity is shaped not only by its physical and symbolic attributes but by the relational negotiations between locals, visitors, histories, and futures. While the city provides rich conditions for creative, co-constituted experiences, these are increasingly mediated by processes of homogenisation, thematic packaging, and spatial reconfiguration.

Theme 2: Perception of Appeal

The perception of Budapest's appeal emerged as a multidimensional construct grounded in both practical affordances and aesthetic-sensory experience. Participants described the city as not only functional and accessible, but emotionally engaging, youthful, and atmospherically rich. These perspectives reflect an ontologically situated understanding of urban tourism, where appeal is not a fixed trait of the destination but a relational quality, constituted through movement, interpretation, and embodied perception. The theme was structured across two intersecting dimensions: livability and accessibility, and the city's aesthetic and atmospheric charm.

Regarding livability and accessibility, participants repeatedly emphasized the ease with which the city could be navigated, citing public transport, green spaces, and general spatial coherence as major contributors to its perceived appeal.

“Public transport is excellent as tourists can get anywhere easily” (Expert 2),

remarked one interviewee, while another noted,

“There are lots of parks and green places that make the city feel breathable” (Expert 4).

These statements show a perception of Budapest as a livable city, where urban infrastructure is not only efficient but integrative, enabling both locals and tourists to move fluidly between districts and experiences.

Such qualities were not viewed as separate from tourism, but as foundational to the atmospheric conditions that support tourism. The experience of place was repeatedly linked to how it is inhabited and traversed.

“The distances are humane, and you can be spontaneous here.” (Expert 7).

This echoes a phenomenological perspective in which the appeal of a city emerges from the rhythm and texture of being-in-place, not simply from what is there, but from how one moves, dwells, and connects.

These reflections further support the idea that the infrastructure of livability is also the infrastructure of tourism. Unlike staged attractions, public transport networks, pedestrian-friendly zones, and accessible green spaces foster a more inclusive, democratic form of tourism, where the city is experienced in ways similar to local life. This is deeply aligned with the creative tourism paradigm, which calls for modes of travel that prioritize encounter, participation, and shared everydayness over passive spectacle. The ease of movement in Budapest enables visitors to thread together their own routes through the city, supporting autonomous and interpretive engagements with place.

While practical accessibility was essential to perceived appeal, it was the atmosphere and aesthetic feel of the city that often anchored emotional connection. Experts described Budapest as *“alive, not just historic”* (Expert 3), and *“full of small, surprising places”* (Expert 8). These comments reflect a preference for textured aesthetics over uniform polish, and for alternative character over classical perfection. This reflects a broader anthropological sensibility, wherein urban charm arises not from monumentality alone, but from ambivalence, layering, and sensory friction.

Several participants contrasted Budapest with other European cities perceived as overly curated or commercialised. *“It’s more real than Vienna,”* one noted, *“you can feel the rough edges”* (Expert 9). The city was described as having a youthful, alternative energy rooted in its subcultural scenes, ruin bars, art collectives, and music festivals. These features were not only seen as marketable, but as authentic expressions of a living urban culture, reinforcing the city’s appeal to those seeking engagement beyond the surface of heritage.

The charm of Budapest, in this sense, lies in its resistance to closure. It is not a fully themed city, but a city that remains narratively open, offering tourists the possibility to contribute to the story, not just consume it. Yet, this openness is also precarious.

Several experts acknowledged that the city's alternative atmosphere is increasingly under pressure from development and standardization.

"The charm could disappear if everything becomes Airbnbs and chains"
(Expert 5).

Here, the appeal of Budapest is revealed to be temporally and socially contingent not an abstract quality but a product of urban rhythms, cultural practices, and contested futures. The creative value of the city, therefore, is not only a matter of branding or aesthetics but of sustaining the conditions for emergence, multiplicity, and friction.

Theme 3: Drivers of Tourism

The interviews revealed how the expansion of tourism in Budapest is shaped by broader global infrastructures and imaginaries, particularly through low-cost accessibility and shifting middle-class travel cultures. These drivers were not merely framed as background conditions but were understood to shape the way the city is known, imagined, and experienced. In this sense, the theme offers important insight into the epistemological dimensions of tourism regarding how Budapest is constructed in the mental maps of tourists and how these constructions, in turn, shape the material and symbolic life of the city.

The role of low-cost airlines and digital platforms was consistently foregrounded.

"Ryanair and WizzAir made the city accessible to anyone with €30 and a weekend." (Expert 6).

This infrastructure was seen as generating new temporalities of tourism such as shorter, more frequent visits while also shifting the basis upon which destination choices are made.

"People come not because they want Budapest specifically, but because it fits the price and time slot." (Expert 9).

These statements point to an important epistemological shift: the city is no longer approached through historical, cultural, or narrative lenses, but through metrics of affordability, ease, and convenience. Budapest is rendered knowable as a budget destination, a label that flattens its identity and aesthetic specificity into comparative value. In this process, the knowledge that circulates about Budapest becomes abstracted from local contexts, shaped instead by platform economies, user reviews, and algorithmic visibility. This reconfiguration of how places are known and chosen

has ontological, phenomenological and anthropological consequences: it alters not only who comes, but how they come, experience and transform the tourism milieu.

Participants also highlighted a diversification of tourist profiles.

“Budapest fits that new middle-class expectation: affordable, safe, Instagrammable.” (Expert 7).

These accounts again reveal how Budapest’s image is shaped by the social imaginaries of emerging global classes, for whom travel is both a performance of mobility and a claim to cosmopolitan belonging. From an epistemological lens, the appeal of Budapest is not discovered but co-produced through affective economies, digital mediation, and the search for ‘authentic-yet-affordable’ experiences. The city becomes legible through certain frames as budget, accessible, photogenic which circulate within particular social fields of aspiration.

Yet, this redefinition of place identity carries with it critical tensions.

“When the city becomes tailored to middle-class mass appeal, you risk losing the things that make it different in the first place” (Expert 4).

This statement suggests that as epistemic representations become dominant, they begin to reshape the material city itself driving policy, planning, and investment in ways that may be at odds with local narratives or creative potential.

The findings here reaffirm that tourism is not merely the movement of people, but the movement of representations, expectations, and performative knowledge systems. The image of Budapest as a “budget destination” is not innocent; it becomes a filter through which experiences are selected, evaluated, and remembered, shaping the very ontology of the place for both visitors and residents. In this sense, the epistemological conditions of tourism must be seen as central and not peripheral to understanding its urban impact.

Theme 4: Impacts of the Party District

The impacts of nightlife and party-oriented tourism in Budapest, particularly in and around the 7th district, emerged as one of the most frequently discussed and emotionally charged topics across the interviews. While tourism is often associated with vitality and economic opportunity, participants described a profound dissonance between the imagined city of entertainment and the lived city of disorder and fatigue. The party district became a focal point for this tension as divergent temporalities,

ethical expectations, and spatial practices collide. This theme unfolds across two interrelated domains: the material and social consequences of party tourism, and the emergent discourse around regulation, planning, and spatial justice.

Participants widely characterised the party district as saturated with disruption: excessive noise, inappropriate behaviour, uncollected garbage, and public intoxication.

“There’s no silence anymore in the evenings. People scream until four in the morning.” (Expert 3)

“Garbage is everywhere, people just throw bottles on the street.” (Expert 9).

Noise management was also flagged as a major gap in urban services. While some noise is an inevitable part of vibrant city life, the lack of regulatory mechanisms such as acoustic zoning or decibel limits was seen as a failure of institutional care.

“There’s no framework for balancing liveliness with livability.” (Expert 9).

These accounts reflect a deeply phenomenological disturbance not just in terms of sensory overload, but in the affective breakdown of what it means to inhabit a neighbourhood.

Several interviewees described the inversion of the everyday: the replacement of ordinary rhythms with those imposed by nightlife economies.

“It’s like we live in a theme park made for stag parties.” (Expert 5).

Such metaphors indicate a profound alienation from place, where local residents no longer feel that the neighbourhood reflects or respects their lifeworlds. From an anthropological perspective, this reflects a shift in the moral geography of the district: who belongs to where, what is appropriate, and when activities are permitted is being redefined by external demands and temporality.

This dissonance also has epistemological dimensions. The party district is increasingly known and promoted through a singular lens as a playground for cheap entertainment obscuring the lived complexities of the area. In this representational frame, the 7th district is flattened into a brand: edgy, permissive, and hedonistic.

“Budapest is being sold as the place to come and lose control” (Expert 8).

These mediated representations participate in the making of tourist subjectivities and inform visitor expectations, normalising behaviours that may be deeply disruptive to local life.

Participants regularly expressed frustration with the lack of basic urban cleanliness, particularly in tourism-heavy areas.

“Trash is everywhere on Sunday mornings. There are not enough bins, and those we have are not emptied fast enough.” (Expert 3).

Others commented on the absence of public toilets, describing it as both a discomfort and a dignity issue.

“We get thousands of tourists, but they have nowhere to go. It’s embarrassing.” (Expert 5).

These concerns highlight a broader phenomenological insight: that tourism is not experienced solely through attractions, but through the everyday atmosphere of the city, its sounds, smells, cleanliness, and ambient comfort. When services fail, it is not only efficiency that suffers, but place attachment, emotional resonance, and the ethical experience of co-presence in urban space.

Importantly, the absence of care in tourist zones was interpreted by some as a symbolic message. These spaces are for short-term use, consumption, and disposal, rather than long-term dwelling or stewardship. This reflects an ontological misalignment between how space is designed and how it is actually inhabited.

“You can feel that the city wasn’t planned for people to stay and feel comfortable. It’s about throughput, not presence.” (Expert 6).

Participants also identified problems in tourist movement and wayfinding, citing poor signage, limited integration between transport systems, and chaotic bus drop-off zones.

“Tourist buses just park wherever they want. There’s no real logic or coordination.” (Expert 1).

Pedestrian movement was also seen as underprioritised.

“It’s hard to cross major intersections or walk along the Danube without interruption. There’s no real promenade logic.” (Expert 4).

The negative impact is a double displacement: the physical and sensory displacement of residents, and the epistemological displacement of alternative narratives about the neighbourhood's history, community, and meaning.

Amid this disruption, many participants called for more intentional spatial planning and regulatory frameworks. There were proposals for pedestrianised nightlife zones, limits on opening hours, and stricter licensing for bars and hostels.

“There’s no clear policy on how to balance tourism with local life. Everything is reactive, nothing is planned.” (Expert 6).

Others emphasised the need for temporal zoning, such as limits on noise after certain hours, and civic co-decision-making to ensure local perspectives shape development. These calls reflect an ontological challenge to dominant models of tourism governance. Rather than seeing tourism as inherently positive or neutral, participants foregrounded the asymmetrical burdens of the visitor economy, especially when spatially concentrated. The concept of the “right to the city” was implicit in several narratives, where interviewees described a struggle to reclaim everyday urban life from the demands of spectacle and consumption.

“It’s not just about tourists being here, it’s about who the city is being made for.” (Expert 4).

From a phenomenological standpoint, the desire for regulation was not framed in technocratic terms alone, but as a response to the eroded conditions for dwelling. Residents sought not only silence, but a restoration of temporal and ethical rhythm, where neighbourhood life could once again unfold in accordance with locally meaningful norms.

At the same time, interviewees expressed ambivalence. Several acknowledged that the nightlife economy had brought energy and international visibility to Budapest, and that its creative roots especially the ruin bar scene had initially emerged from genuinely local, grassroots culture.

“It started as something unique and creative, but now it’s become a caricature of itself” (Expert 7).

This indicates that the problem is not nightlife per se, but its intensification, standardisation, and decoupling from local life.

Thus, this theme illuminates the need to move beyond simplistic binaries of “pro-tourism” and “anti-tourism,” and to engage more deeply with situated spatial politics, ethics of cohabitation, and the temporal organisation of urban life. It demands that creative tourism frameworks not only foster artistic or participatory

activity, but address the power geometries that determine who gets to define the mood, tempo, and meaning of a place.

Theme 5: Media and Perception

This theme explores how the media mediates public understandings of tourism in Budapest particularly how press narratives frame the issue of overtourism. While tourism is often approached through its material impacts (crowding, housing, noise), participants emphasised the crucial role of media in shaping what tourism is understood to be, how it is problematised, and whose voices are legitimised in that framing. In doing so, this theme engages directly with epistemological questions not only what is known about tourism, but how it becomes knowable, and whose perspectives are amplified or omitted in that process.

Several participants critiqued the Hungarian and international media for what they perceived as exaggerated or selective portrayals of tourism in Budapest.

“There’s a certain hype around ‘overtourism’ in the press, but it’s not always based on data. It’s often anecdotal or driven by particular agendas.” (Expert 3).

“Sometimes the media simplifies the issue to stag parties and noise, but that’s just one layer. It’s more complex than that.” (Expert 7).

These statements reflect a critical awareness of how discursive framing can produce dominant readings of a phenomenon, which may not fully reflect local nuances or structural conditions. From an epistemological perspective, such narratives reveal how tourism becomes legible through specific tropes and media grammars such as crisis, invasion, or disorder. These tropes carry affective weight and can mobilise public sentiment or political response, often in reductive ways.

“There’s a tendency to represent tourists as a threat to the city, which can create moral panic.” (Expert 5).

This moral framing positions tourism not only as a spatial issue but as a symbolic conflict, shaping how urban identity and legitimacy are negotiated. These accounts also echo broader critiques in critical tourism and media studies, which argue that overtourism is often constructed through selective visualities (e.g., images of crowded landmarks, rowdy tourists, or trash-strewn streets) that obscure structural drivers such as deregulation, housing policy, or lack of governance. Participants

expressed frustration that the media tends to depict symptoms, not causes, which then deflects attention from municipal or national responsibility.

“It’s easier to blame tourists than to ask why the city allows unregulated Airbnb or 24/7 bar openings.” (Expert 2).

In this way, media narratives not only describe tourism, they participate in governing it discursively, creating categories of legitimacy, blame, and urgency. The epistemic power of media thus becomes central: it sets the parameters of the conversation, shapes public perceptions, and influences what kinds of solutions are deemed appropriate or even thinkable.

Several interviewees also noted that media coverage influences local sentiment, often reinforcing binary oppositions between residents and tourists.

“People start to see tourists as a problem, as outsiders. It creates division.” (Expert 4).

Others reflected on how such portrayals could be used strategically by local actors such as activists, politicians, business owners depending on their objectives.

“For some, the overtourism narrative is a tool to push for regulation; for others, it’s a way to avoid regulation by framing it as just a PR issue” (Expert 6).

These dynamics underscore the symbolic politics of tourism. Media does not simply report on urban processes; it co-produces them by reinforcing certain subjectivities (e.g., the “rowdy tourist,” the “angry local,” the “passive municipality”) and marginalising others. From an anthropological perspective, this discursive filtering is consequential: it shapes whose experiences count, what forms of knowledge are institutionalised, and what futures are rendered visible or invisible.

Such insights challenge technocratic approaches to tourism planning that treat perception as separate from policy. On the contrary, the findings suggest that governance is always mediated and that media representation is a core site where the struggle over urban futures unfolds. Understanding how tourism is narrated, and by whom, becomes as important as understanding its physical footprints.

Theme 6: Governance and Regulation

This theme examines the fragmented and often ineffective governance structures shaping tourism in Budapest. Across interviews, participants voiced deep concerns

about the lack of coordinated regulation, policy ambiguity, and insufficient enforcement of tourism-related rules. Governance was not described simply as an administrative challenge, but as a key dimension in the ontological production of urban space determining whose interests are prioritised, which narratives of tourism are legitimised, and what kinds of urban futures are rendered possible.

The analysis reveals a threefold pattern: institutional fragmentation across governance levels, weak regulatory enforcement, and a shared desire for strategic, inclusive interventions.

Many participants described a disjuncture between district-level, city-wide, and national governance bodies.

“Districts want to do one thing, the city another, and the national level doesn’t communicate at all.” (Expert 5).

Others cited instances where tourism policies were stalled or undermined due to jurisdictional conflicts:

“The city cannot even set closing hours without a fight with the district or pushback from national tourism offices.” (Expert 6).

These accounts illustrate an epistemological fragmentation: a system in which knowledge about tourism impacts, regulation, and responsibilities is siloed, contested, and often incomplete. From a governance standpoint, this creates institutional opacity, making it difficult for residents, businesses, or even policymakers to understand who is accountable for which aspects of tourism development.

Moreover, this fragmentation undermines relational understandings of place, as different levels of government often act without consideration for local lived realities. The lack of coordination reveals a broader ontological tension between place as lived and place as governed between the rhythms of everyday urban life and the abstractions of policy architectures.

Even when rules exist such as noise limits, zoning for bars, or restrictions on short-term rentals, participants noted that enforcement is weak or selectively applied.

“We have rules on paper, but nobody enforces them. You can call the police ten times and nothing happens.” (Expert 8).

Others described a system of “soft corruption”, where certain venues operate outside the law through informal agreements or economic leverage.

From a phenomenological perspective, this failure is not merely technical; it erodes trust in the city as a shared, governable space. The absence of enforcement fosters a sense of abandonment among residents and creates conditions where exploitative tourism practices flourish unchecked.

“When you see that some bars never close, never pay fines, you start to feel like the city is not yours anymore.” (Expert 4).

These statements speak to the affective dimensions of governance. Regulation is not only a matter of control. It is a mode of care, of acknowledging who counts and whose presence matters. In its absence, the city becomes perceived as unclaimed territory, open to extraction rather than cohabitation. This perception, in turn, affects how locals relate to tourists, to space, and to institutions.

Despite the criticisms, many participants offered constructive suggestions for governance renewal. These included clearer legal frameworks for short-term rentals, stricter licensing for hospitality venues, coordinated closing hours, and the establishment of pedestrian-only zones in nightlife-heavy districts.

“There should be a real strategic plan, not just numbers and promotion, but a vision for how tourism fits into city life.” (Expert 2).

Others called for public participation mechanisms in tourism planning, noting the absence of local voices in current processes.

These proposals reflect an implicit demand for a relational governance model which recognises tourism as intertwined with housing, mobility, public health, and cultural heritage. This is deeply aligned with the principles of creative tourism, which presupposes a dialogical and situated approach to development, rather than top-down imposition or market-only solutions.

Moreover, the desire for better regulation was not framed as resistance to tourism itself, but as a call for balance, reciprocity, and mutual responsibility. Participants recognised tourism’s contributions, but emphasised that without strategic foresight and ethical planning, these benefits are unequally distributed and socially unsustainable.

Ultimately, this theme highlights that the governance of tourism is not only a logistical issue but a deeply epistemological and ontological one: it determines how the city is known, who it is for, and how conflicting claims to space are negotiated. Without integrated, transparent, and co-created regulation, the city risks becoming a site of extractive tourism rather than a platform for shared urban futures.

Theme 7: Domestic Tourism

While international tourism has visibly shaped Budapest's urban landscape, interview data revealed a striking absence of strategic attention to domestic tourism, particularly in relation to affordability, programming, and cultural engagement. Participants described a sense of mismatch between the city's tourism offerings and local needs, pointing not only to material exclusion (e.g., cost) but also to epistemological invisibility.

This theme emerged around two interconnected concerns: accessibility barriers rooted in affordability and pricing structures, and the lack of targeted programs or packages for domestic and especially youth populations.

Many participants emphasised that prices in central districts have become increasingly misaligned with local income levels.

“Budapest has become too expensive for Hungarian families to vacation in their own capital.” (Expert 4).

“A coffee or a meal in the city centre now costs what it would in Vienna. But local salaries haven't caught up.” (Expert 1).

These reflections highlight not only economic exclusion but epistemological dissonance: the city is increasingly framed and priced for others, rendering locals marginal within their own urban narrative.

Such mismatches reflect a failure to view domestic residents as potential tourists within their own territory which resonates with anthropological critiques of internal othering in tourism. The idea that cultural heritage, leisure experiences, and urban hospitality are assets to be consumed primarily by foreigners creates a double alienation of residents as both hosts and non-participants.

“It's ironic, people come from abroad to enjoy the city, but kids from here might never afford to take a boat tour on the Danube.” (Expert 6).

This ontological exclusion being physically close yet symbolically outside raises urgent questions about the social justice of tourism development. If access to one's own cultural and urban landscape becomes gated through pricing structures and spatial reorientation, the city's tourism identity shifts from inclusive to extractive.

Beyond affordability, participants noted a significant absence of programs or initiatives designed to actively engage local audiences.

"There are almost no offers that target Hungarian youth or families."
(Expert 7).

"Tourism is still imagined as something that happens to us but not with us."
(Expert 2).

These comments speak to an epistemic gap in tourism governance. The local is not just underserved economically, but underrepresented in planning imaginaries.

This lack of domestic-oriented programming also reflects missed opportunities for relational, low-impact, and participatory tourism. Several interviewees mentioned that domestic tourism could be a key ally in supporting year-round cultural engagement, distributing benefits more equitably, and building place attachment.

"If we developed stronger domestic tourism, we wouldn't need to rely so heavily on stag parties in the high season." (Expert 5).

From a phenomenological perspective, the absence of domestic tourism offerings narrows the city's experiential affordances, limiting not only economic access, but also emotional and cultural identification. The opportunity to re-discover one's city, to explore hidden narratives, or to participate in creative experiences is not only a matter of leisure, but of belonging and civic intimacy.

As such, domestic tourism is not a secondary market but a critical terrain for rebalancing urban tourism. It offers the potential to support sustainable, socially rooted models of cultural participation. Yet this requires a shift in governance and discourse from seeing tourism as external demand to understanding it as a shared social infrastructure, co-created by and for residents as much as visitors.

Theme 8: Post-COVID Recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic produced a profound rupture in the rhythms, economies, and imaginaries of urban tourism. Interview participants described this period not only as a crisis but as a moment of ontological exposure when the foundations of the

city's tourism model were laid bare, revealing both its fragility and its spatial asymmetries. This theme revolves around two key reflections: the economic consequences of halted tourism, and the emergent awareness of systemic over-dependence on particular visitor profiles and sectors.

Participants described severe and widespread consequences for the tourism and hospitality sectors, including business closures, layoffs, and dramatic revenue losses.

"Whole streets of bars and restaurants shut down and some permanently."
(Expert 6).

"People working in tourism were the first to lose jobs, and there was very little support." (Expert 9).

These statements point not only to economic loss but to a phenomenological break in the city's everyday life where spaces once saturated with movement, sound, and encounter became eerily emptied. Several experts highlighted the collapse of demand not just as a temporary downturn, but as a deep structural shock.

"It revealed how dependent the city had become on one kind of tourist, especially the low-cost, party-weekend type." (Expert 3).

This monoculture had previously been masked by volume, but the pandemic exposed its narrow base and lack of resilience.

The city's overreliance on short-stay international visitors, and the neglect of domestic and alternative tourism strategies, became newly visible. As one expert put it, *"When the tourists disappeared, we had no plan B"* (Expert 2). This indicates a broader epistemological failure. Tourism had been imagined primarily as growth, with little contingency or long-term thinking about equity, diversity, or sustainability.

While the pandemic brought devastation, it also opened a critical discursive space in which assumptions could be questioned and alternatives considered.

"For the first time, we saw what the city is like without tourism and it was both peaceful and scary." (Expert 5).

This ontological unmaking of the tourism city allowed residents and planners to reconsider what kind of tourism they wanted and for whom the city should be designed.

Some participants saw the lockdown as a chance to reset, suggesting it was time to move away from volume-based tourism and toward more relational, creative, and place-sensitive models.

“We need to stop chasing numbers and start thinking about meaning, what experiences we offer, and what kind of city we want to be part of those experiences” (Expert 7).

These reflections resonate directly with the creative tourism paradigm at the heart of this study, which views tourism as a shared, interpretive, and ethical process not merely a transaction.

Importantly, these reimaginings were not utopian. Several experts warned that the window for transformation was closing fast.

“After the pandemic, things went back to ‘normal’ faster than we thought and not necessarily in a good way” (Expert 8).

The return of low-cost flights and the resurgence of party tourism were seen by some as evidence of institutional inertia and missed opportunity.

Interviewees also emphasized that the post-COVID moment, while fragile, opened a window for repositioning District VII, not by returning to the pre-pandemic ‘party district’ model, but by embedding tourism more firmly in creativity, community resilience, and cultural care. They noted that certain initiatives such as pop-up cultural programs, local campaigns, and temporary pedestrian zones provided glimpses of alternative futures. These examples, while often short-lived, demonstrated the possibility of tourism development rooted in community, creativity, and shared authorship. The pandemic moment revealed tourism as not only an economic sector, but as a set of ethical and existential choices about urban life. The recovery process was therefore not just about restoring flows but about redefining values: what counts as success, who tourism is for, and how the city negotiates vulnerability and care.

Theme 9: Cultural Tourism Potential

The final theme emerging from the interviews centred on the untapped potential of cultural tourism in Erzsébetváros. While Budapest enjoys global recognition for its monumental architecture and historical heritage, participants consistently highlighted the lack of participatory, creative, and community-rooted cultural

experiences in the city's tourism offer. The dominant approach to tourism was seen as reductive treating visitors as passive consumers of surface-level heritage rather than as potential participants in cultural co-creation.

This critique unfolded along two interconnected lines: the symbolic emptiness of heritage branding, and the structural barriers to developing small-scale, grassroots cultural practices that could support more authentic and inclusive tourism forms.

"If we call it the Jewish Quarter, then let there be programming... there's no content, just a label." (Expert 2).

This statement reflects an ontological fragility, where spatial identities are invoked for tourism marketing but remain underdeveloped as lived, interpretive, and community-held narratives.

"They come, look around, but they don't take part... there's no space where they could join in." (Expert 8).

This critique reveals an epistemological gap in how cultural value is conceptualized. Tourists are not invited into cultural dialogue or process, but rather positioned as outside observers disconnected from the everyday rhythms and textures of place.

Others pointed toward alternative models already latent within the urban fabric. Expert 5 emphasized that visitors increasingly seek localized, creative encounters that build proximity with residents:

"People like the smaller things... design shops, workshops, these bring them much closer to locals." (Expert 5).

Such remarks reflect the implicit presence of a creative tourism imaginary where culture is not fixed in monuments or stages, but emerges through shared practices, informal aesthetics, and mutual storytelling.

Yet, this potential is constrained by institutional imbalance.

"The big institutions take the attention and resources... the small ones can't become visible." (Expert 4).

This asymmetry in visibility and funding speaks to a structural challenge. Cultural governance continues to privilege formal, centralized venues while overlooking the distributed, relational labor of smaller cultural actors.

These reflections make clear that creative tourism has the potential to redefine tourism as a shared, situated, and co-produced cultural process. It is precisely this emerging vision that informed the direction of Phase 2. In that next stage, the research turned to cultural institutions, program directors and staff as key actors attempting to operationalize these alternative cultural values often under conditions of civic strain, regulatory complexity, and institutional precarity. Their experiences offer a grounded view into the constraints and possibilities of creative cultural governance within a tourism-saturated district.

8.2. Phase 2: Institutional reflexivity and the constraints of cultural co-creation

Building on the inductive thematic analysis conducted in Phase 1, Phase 2 of this research engaged in-depth qualitative interviews with 4 institutional actors working at the forefront of cultural programming and urban transformation in Erzsébetváros. While the first phase focused on emergent resident narratives and everyday practices, this phase shifts attention to those shaping, implementing, and negotiating cultural policy and urban change from within formal structures. The aim was to situate institutional knowledges, affective labor, and epistemic tensions within the broader dynamics of tourism, gentrification, and identity reconstruction.

Guided by a conceptual model rooted in ontological situatedness, epistemology, phenomenology, and anthropology, the interviews explored how cultural actors experience, understand, and respond to the district's evolving conditions. These actors are not treated merely as administrators but as ontologically embedded stewards whose work is shaped by the constraints and contradictions of their environments. Through their reflections, we gain insight into the operational, symbolic, and emotional dimensions of cultural governance in a tourism-saturated, socially fragmented urban landscape.

This phase interrogates how tourism milieu is produced, disrupted, and reassembled by institutions caught between community needs and regulatory limits. It also considers how creative tourism might serve as a vehicle for co-creation and participatory authorship, provided that the structural and epistemic conditions for such engagement are nurtured.

Through a reflexive thematic analysis, the following sections synthesize key themes that emerged: cultural revitalization, institutional roles, community engagement,

regulatory and logistical challenges, cultural identity tensions, and public perception. Each theme is examined not only descriptively but philosophically, revealing how cultural labor is enmeshed in broader ontopolitical and symbolic struggles over the meaning and future of Erzsébetváros.

8.2.1. Cultural revitalization and urban strategy

In Erzsébetváros, the project of cultural revitalization is not just a series of municipal interventions. It is a deeply situated response to the ontological disorientation produced by tourism capitalism, where the district's identity has been re-scripted through global party tourism. The aim of cultural workers and institutions is not to erase nightlife culture but to resituate the district within a broader social and epistemic horizon, where its being is once again anchored in local rhythms, memories, and attachments.

This ontological labor is initiated through a deliberate effort to dislodge the tourism-dominant imaginary that frames Erzsébetváros as a zone of excess and erasure. The municipality seeks to offer an alternative narrative, one that holds nightlife as only one element within a diverse urban ecology. The following remark by a municipal cultural staff member captures this shift:

“The party district isn't just about groups coming from abroad for bachelor and bachelorette parties... We are thinking a lot about how to take the edge off it, to show that it's not just about Király Street and the party district, which it has become famous for.”

This is a powerful epistemic statement. It challenges the ways in which the district has come to be known largely through external, commodified representations and asserts the authority of situated, lived knowledge over extractive, outsider imaginaries. In this sense, cultural revitalization is a form of epistemic resistance. It reclaims the right to define what the district is, not from the perspective of digital marketing or tourism platforms, but from within the embedded textures of everyday life.

“We want... to offset a little the party tourism... to balance it out a bit... so they can see that there are not only vomiting English tourists.”

This blunt observation reveals the epistemic violence of spectacle, showing how dominant tourism narratives simplify and distort the rich complexity of a place into

easily consumed stereotypes. The municipality's counter-effort is not only corrective but creative. It seeks to generate alternative knowledge ecologies grounded in care, continuity, and reciprocal visibility.

These epistemic reorientations are operationalized through phenomenological and sensory recalibrations. Programs like weekend concerts are not random events, they are strategic interventions into the district's affective and temporal architecture.

"We're preparing different concerts... small trios, duos, quartets. On Saturdays, Fridays... to show that this place is not just about wild partying."

These cultural formats act on the body and atmosphere. They create zones of softness and slowness, inviting residents and visitors alike into modes of presence that differ sharply from the speed, loudness, and anonymity of nightlife. They embody what one might call phenomenologies of care practices that transform the felt experience of the district through rhythm, intimacy, and intergenerational invitation.

"For the 1–4 age group of children, we offer various activities... musical, rhyming, folk song activities in the mornings. Local mothers are kindly invited."

This attention to the youngest residents illustrates the ethics of emplacement that underpins the revitalization strategy. By designing for children and caregivers groups often rendered invisible in tourism-dominated districts. The municipality affirms a care-centered ontological claim: this place is still lived, still interdependent, still worthy of soft infrastructure.

From an anthropological lens, these interventions also function as programs of reattachment, they activate cultural memory and collective recognition. Street art, in particular, is deployed to reinscribe marginalized parts of the district into a shared spatial narrative:

"Street art... we want to start in outer Erzsébetváros to lift them back towards the majority community... to show that you are important too."

This reveals a symbolic and territorial politics of belonging. The aesthetic reclamation of space is used to assert value and visibility, not only in the inner nightlife zone but in the outer areas often excluded from both investment and imagination.

What emerges is a latent model of creative tourism as co-creation. Although not fully realized, the cultural office's practices point toward a vision in which visitors are not mere consumers but are invited into participatory cultural processes such as music workshops, co-designed murals, family events structured around mutual respect and shared authorship. This would require deeper infrastructuring, but its foundation is already present in the relational, embedded, and care-oriented ethos of current municipal efforts.

Cultural revitalization in Erzsébetváros is an ontological and epistemological re-making of place that engages bodies, senses, narratives, and political imaginaries in order to reclaim the right to live, know, and co-create the city amid the noise of spectacle.

8.2.1. Institutional and governmental roles

The cultural institutions of Erzsébetváros do far more than coordinate events. They act as ontologically situated agents of care, navigating a complex urban ecosystem where the symbolic, sensory, and social dimensions of the district are in constant flux. In the context of a rapidly transforming tourism milieu, these institutions serve as anchors of continuity, tasked with defending, rearticulating, and rebuilding a sense of place that has been diluted by spectacle and transience.

“The organization of cultural events falls on us in any case... this is more of a noble task than a favor.”

This description reveals a governance logic grounded not in compliance but in ethical and affective responsibility. Cultural programming is understood as a civic duty of re-inhabiting urban space through relational commitment. This ethos of embedded care allows these institutions to perform a crucial epistemic function: not only designing cultural offerings but cultivating the conditions through which local meanings can re-emerge and circulate.

“The local government is very supportive in this regard. Very. Yes. The local government is supporting very much.”

While this support is meaningful, it remains constrained by deeper institutional dependencies and jurisdictional limitations. Cultural institutions find themselves within interdependent ecosystems, reliant on collaborations with schools, kindergartens, NGOs, and service providers to reach residents and deliver

programming. These networks are often productive, but they also reflect the limits of institutional autonomy.

“We usually do job counseling at a foundation... together with a foundation... for an external Erzsébetváros.”

This multifaceted involvement blurs the boundaries between culture, welfare, and informal care. Institutions are connective tissues, mediating between fragmented systems to address educational gaps, social isolation, and urban dislocation. In doing so, they redefine what cultural work means: it becomes a site of interdisciplinary encounter, where storytelling, pedagogy, and livelihood support converge.

A standout feature of this institutional strategy is the relational integration of educational partners. Schools and kindergartens serve as entry points for understanding community needs, building trust, and co-creating programs.

“We contacted kindergartens, schools, and we involve them... to ask what they think is needed here, from educational catch-up to cultural programs.”

This approach foregrounds horizontal epistemologies recognizing that knowledge of local life cannot be centralized but must be gathered through distributed listening. It also creates an infrastructure for creative tourism as co-creation, where future programming could invite tourists to join in co-designed storytelling or intergenerational workshops. Visitors, like locals, would be treated not as audiences but as participants in mutual world-making.

Yet these efforts are constantly hampered by structural asymmetries in authority. Municipal institutions are responsible for cultural life and quality of public space, yet lack the legal or infrastructural jurisdiction to control nightlife venues, enforce safety measures, or reconfigure the physical environment.

“We cannot go in to check [venues]... what happens inside is not within our jurisdiction.”

This produces a disjuncture between responsibility and power, a form of epistemic misalignment, where the people most embedded in the district’s everyday life are structurally prevented from fully shaping it. As a result, cultural institutions often operate in a reactive mode, absorbing the social costs of a tourism economy they cannot govern, and relying on symbolic gestures in the face of systemic disorder.

This institutional condition reflects a broader ontological tension: cultural actors attempt to stabilize and enrich the meanings of place in a district whose identity is increasingly outsourced, automated, and commodified. Despite this, their efforts continue not as resistance, but as reassertion of a co-located urban ethic, where cultural meaning is not imported but grown through proximity, memory, and shared responsibility.

In this configuration, institutions become epistemic mediators translating between the knowledges of residents, the agendas of government, and the pressures of global tourism. They create microclimates of care, soft spaces of relationality in an otherwise hardened tourism landscape.

To fully realize their potential particularly in enabling creative tourism as participatory engagement, these institutions will need greater flexibility, infrastructural support, and recognition of their symbolic and relational labor. But even in their current form, they point toward a vision of urban cultural governance as co-created, locally grounded, and attuned to the lived texture of place.

8.2.3. Community engagement and participation

In Erzsébetváros, community engagement emerges not as an auxiliary to cultural programming but as a core ontological and epistemological practice to reclaim urban meaning through proximity, attention, and mutual recognition. Amid the relentless churn of tourism, nightlife, and displacement, cultural institutions are working to anchor a sense of place through programs of inclusion and everyday presence.

This form of engagement is a situated ethic of care that acknowledges the district's ontological fragmentation and seeks to repair it by reintroducing social continuity, familial rhythms, and intergenerational memory into spaces that have become overcoded by ephemerality and excess.

Among the most effective interventions are the programs developed for children aged 1–4. These activities including baby theater, puppet shows, musical sessions, and English-language storytelling are designed not only to entertain but to re-establish affective programs of local attachment.

“We offer various activities at the cultural centre... musical, rhyming, folk song activities in the mornings, so local mothers are kindly invited there.”

This is more than cultural exposure. It is a phenomenological act of reconditioning space. These moments generate atmospheres that contrast sharply with the dominant sensory ecology of the party district. They are spatial interruptions of noise and velocity, replacing them with patterns of care, attentiveness, and relationality.

Importantly, this work is epistemically distributed. Cultural workers do not operate from a position of expertise alone, but actively co-design programming with local institutions, particularly schools and kindergartens.

“We involve them in this organization... to ask what they think is needed here, from educational catch-up to cultural programs.”

This co-creation reflects a horizontal epistemology, privileging proximity, embedded knowledge, and iterative feedback over detached strategy. The very structure of cultural programming is thus reshaped by an ethic of listening as an essential counter-move in a district dominated by tourism narratives that speak over, rather than with, its inhabitants.

Recognizing Erzsébetváros’s demographic complexity, cultural actors have begun implementing multilingual and cross-cultural formats to engage foreign residents.

“(....) holds this kind of music-instrument workshop, so the little ones can also practice English... there are a lot of people in Erzsébetváros who speak English.”

These efforts gesture toward a more inclusive sense of epistemic belonging, where non-Hungarian speakers are invited into cultural life not as guests but as co-participants. This is a key shift: from culture as representation to culture as shared authorship. Still, engagement remains uneven, often hampered by digital fragmentation and a lack of direct access to transient communities.

“We joined a few new groups on Facebook, like the foreigners living here... but we don't know what other platforms and groups they have.”

This highlights the limits of current outreach models, which rely heavily on institutional intermediaries rather than open, dialogic platforms. The lack of participatory infrastructures makes it difficult to access the full spectrum of urban epistemologies, especially those held by teenagers, migrants, and tenants.

Adolescents and young adults represent the most difficult demographic to reach not because of disinterest, but because they exist within a phenomenological and

symbolic gap. They are rarely addressed directly by institutions and often navigate the district through modes of resistance, performance, and informal sociality that don't map onto existing cultural formats.

"It may be most difficult to involve young teenagers and adolescents in a cultural center or in culture... this causes a huge headache for every cultural institution."

The municipality has expressed interest in more experimental or flexible programs for teenagers, including educational catch-up groups and informal hangout spaces. If developed further, such initiatives could become powerful portals of creative tourism spaces where local youth and visiting young people might collaborate, co-create, and build relational experiences that generate mutual understanding, not merely consumption.

Current feedback systems remain limited, mostly flowing through schools and partner institutions rather than open forums. However, there is a growing awareness of the need to build more democratic feedback mechanisms, rooted in accessibility, trust, and narrative inclusion.

"We plan annually... such public opinion research measurements to see what there is a demand for. But this is best done through institutions."

While effective, this model risks reinforcing institutional gatekeeping, preventing more spontaneous or informal voices such as youth groups, renters, or transient residents from shaping the cultural landscape. A transition toward co-created cultural governance would require the municipality to reimagine feedback not as survey data, but as dialogue and iterative sense-making.

This shift aligns with the broader ethos of cultural equity that underpins much of the engagement strategy:

"These outdoor events are all free, and we strongly believe that culture is also a nourishment, and everyone is entitled to it."

This principle is not only economic but ontological. It affirms the idea that everyone regardless of age, citizenship status, or familiarity with Hungarian culture has the right to belong, contribute, and be seen in the cultural life of the city. Through this lens, community engagement becomes not a service but a practice of re-worlding

urban life, slowly restoring the district's sense of place through repeated, situated, and relational acts.

When supported and expanded, these engagements offer fertile ground for creative tourism as co-creation not as a top-down strategy, but as a lived process in which visitors and residents alike participate in shaping the district's identity. It is in these micro-exchanges, everyday events, and intergenerational touchpoints that the district's future begins to take form more plural, more reciprocal, more livable.

8.2.4. Regulatory and logistical challenges

The interview illuminated a series of structural constraints that systematically limit the municipality's capacity to embed cultural revitalization within the everyday life of Erzsébetváros. These challenges are not only bureaucratic irritants but represent deep ontological fractures in the city's governance infrastructure exposing a condition in which the actors most attuned to local rhythms and cultural needs are paradoxically the least empowered to effect spatial or regulatory change.

At the heart of this limitation lies a disjuncture between municipal responsibility and institutional authority. District-level actors are expected to manage the externalities of tourism, maintain public order, and provide cultural alternatives, but are devoid of jurisdiction over the very venues and behaviors that produce these challenges.

“The local government does not have jurisdiction over what happens inside the entertainment venues themselves. They can enforce things like noise regulations, but they don't have the capacity to monitor what goes on inside the venues.”

This reflects an epistemological blindspot in governance design: those with the closest proximity to urban disorder are denied access to the sites where that disorder is generated. Furthermore, rising concerns such as drink spiking and public safety amplify this governance gap, as the failure to secure internal regulation of nightlife venues leaves residents and cultural workers with a deepened sense of ontological vulnerability.

“So, for example, the children, they put something in their drinks, and then, when they are inside, the municipality has no responsibility, so they usually just kick these children out in front of the building when they collapse. So, we, not us, the municipality is striving to regulate and influence these things

in a way that this does not happen in the entertainment venues in the 7th district.”

These conditions are exacerbated by the absence of support from higher levels of government, including the national police apparatus:

“The city still hasn't received government assistance for more police patrols. It doesn't exist.”

This produces a state of disempowered stewardship, where the municipality must constantly respond to community expectations with insufficient tools. Cultural revitalization, in this context, is forced to operate as a symbolic and affective patchwork, unable to restructure the material and regulatory systems that enable the party tourism economy to persist unchallenged.

Compounding this is the logistical entanglement involved in even the simplest public space interventions such as murals on firewalls. The layering of property ownership between municipal, state, and utility agencies creates a fragmented urban governance terrain where cultural actors must navigate hyper-bureaucratic permission processes.

“These are not municipal-owned surfaces... they belong to the electricity company or BKK... we have to get permission from each one.”

Cost is another prohibitive barrier. Cultural workers shared that a single mural can cost approximately 5 million HUF, a figure that includes artistic production, engineering oversight, and multiple layers of compliance. These expenditures, while technically justified, represent a material obstacle to cultural transformation especially in heritage zones where restrictions are tighter.

“A wall painting costs around 5 million forints... an incredible amount.”

However, they are trying to revitalise the image of the party district through street art as part of the city's cultural initiatives.

“We have a 5-year economic plan that includes a focus on legal street art projects. But these require navigating a complex web of regulations and approvals, as the surfaces we want to use are not under the direct control of the local government. Despite the difficulties, we are trying to utilize these kinds of visual elements to enhance the cultural identity and image of the district, beyond just the party district reputation. However, the operational

and bureaucratic hurdles make it a complex endeavor for the municipality to implement as much street art as we would like.”

Additionally, environmentally restorative interventions, such as tree planting using the Stockholm method, remain economically out of reach:

“The Stockholm tree planting method, which involves carefully routing the tree roots to avoid damaging underground utilities, costs around 5-10 million forints per tree in the city.”

These figures do more than indicate scarcity; they point to a structural misalignment between cultural vision and urban capacity. They demonstrate that despite strong community engagement and institutional intent, the tools of spatial transformation remain functionally unavailable.

Even when physical resources are available, spatial constraints within the dense built environment further limit what can be done. With limited park space and crowded streets, even the installation of small cultural amenities becomes an outsized challenge.

“Placing a ping pong table in Erzsébetváros poses such a big problem... there are six or seven parks this big.”

This spatial compression reflects the broader pressures of the tourism milieu in which urban space is stretched, exhausted, and repurposed, often away from long-term uses like recreation or care. The inability to install something as modest as a ping pong table is not trivial; it reveals how public space itself has been structurally evacuated of the capacity for relational and intergenerational use.

Against this backdrop, the potential for creative tourism as co-creation becomes even more important and even more precarious. The idea of shared cultural authorship between locals and tourists depends on the availability of flexible, inclusive space and a regulatory environment that supports experimentation. As it stands, these preconditions are largely absent. Cultural institutions do their best to improvise within the margins, but without regulatory reform, expanded jurisdiction, and integrated governance, their role remains one of symbolic compensation rather than structural transformation.

Thus, the challenge is not simply to do more with less. It is to reconfigure the ontological, phenomenological and epistemic architecture of urban governance so

that cultural revitalization becomes not only possible but inevitable, grounded in care, informed by local knowledge, and capable of reshaping the sensory, symbolic, and material life of the district.

8.2.5. Cultural identity tensions

The question of cultural identity in Erzsébetváros particularly in reference to the contested use of the term “Jewish Quarter” reflects a deeper set of ontological, epistemological, and symbolic struggles that define how the district is imagined, inhabited, and represented. At the core lies a tension between historical density and contemporary fragmentation, between inherited meanings and the lived experience of a space that has been reshaped by gentrification, nightlife economies, and tourism branding.

“We refer to this part as the Inner City of Erzsébetváros and not as the Jewish Quarter... of course, it is a Jewish Quarter, but I wouldn't separate it.”

This ambivalence reveals a discomfort with the essentializing tendencies of heritage discourse that naming the district “Jewish Quarter” might fix identity in the past, reducing a plural and shifting neighborhood into a consumable symbol. The name becomes a heritage container, one that selectively honors a history of Jewish presence while bypassing the district’s contemporary social heterogeneity and its epistemic complexity.

From an epistemological standpoint, this reflects the limits of dominant tourism narratives, which tend to simplify and sanitize cultural identities for consumption. The term “Jewish Quarter” circulates in guidebooks, websites, and Airbnb listings, often detached from the lived experiences of those who reside there. For many residents and cultural workers, this label does not align with the present ontological reality of the district where Orthodox Jewish communities are not the demographic most impacted by nightlife or public interventions.

“If I look at it from the perspective of Judaism, then it only bothers the Orthodox at most... they don't go out partying anyway.”

Here, the symbolic center of the label (“Jewish”) is decoupled from the everyday materialities of who is addressed, affected, or included in urban transformations. It highlights the anthropological misfit between symbolic representation and lived

experience. The result is a district that feels simultaneously over-narrated and under-recognized as its identity thickened by history but thinned by tourism.

The issue is compounded by demographic churn, economic displacement, and the erosion of long-term residency. As one participant noted:

“I do not sense a strong cultural identity in Erzsébetváros... many people moved out during the COVID times. The local patriotic spirit... affects a very narrow layer.”

This reveals the district’s ontological thinning as a loss of spatial continuity and temporal depth. Cultural institutions are left attempting to foster identity and attachment in an environment where sense of place has been eroded by speed, extraction, and visual branding. The challenge, then, is to create new modes of belonging that do not rely solely on heritage or static identities but are responsive to contemporary lived multiplicity.

This task is complicated by spatial segmentation within the district. The socio-cultural divide between Inner and Outer Erzsébetváros, in both population and aesthetics further fragments any cohesive narrative.

“The inner Erzsébetváros attracts completely different social groups compared to this area here, it's like night and day.”

These contrasts not only affect cultural programming but also undermine the possibility of shared identity frameworks. Place-making must therefore be tailored, localized, and dialogic, attending to divergent demographics, use-patterns, and historical entanglements. From an anthropological perspective, each subzone of the district functions as a semi-autonomous identity ecology, demanding differentiated engagement strategies.

Moreover, interviewees pointed to the buried histories of café culture, literary salons, and music as historical forms of sociability that have been overshadowed by the aesthetics of nightlife:

“The sixth, seventh districts — literature, café culture, serious music, opera... all start from here. But now it's just the party district.”

This lament captures the phenomenological distortion of cultural memory. The textures of past cultural life with their rituals of conversation, slowness, and shared attention have been replaced by ephemeral scenes of tourism. Here, phenomenology

meets political economy: what was once a lived and remembered cultural field becomes a surface for economic performance and image-making.

In response to this, some interviewees gesture toward a more abstract, cosmopolitan identity:

*“I think there isn’t really a cultural identity in Budapest districts anymore .
There is a Budapest identity at best.”*

While this move toward a metropolitan imaginary may offer flexibility and openness, it also risks further detachment from place-specific practices. It raises an important question: Can place-based identity be reconstituted not through essentialism but through co-creation?

This is where the potential for creative tourism as relational authorship becomes powerful. Rather than relying on inherited labels or static narratives, cultural programming could become a space for shared identity work, where residents and visitors co-compose new symbolic and affective relationships to the district. Through co-designed performances, storytelling events, and participatory rituals, the district’s identity could become an emergent property, built not from branding but from situated encounter.

In this framework, the question is not whether Erzsébetváros is a Jewish Quarter, a party district, or a café hub but whether it can become a field of plural belonging, where historical memory, contemporary multiplicity, and shared authorship are held in productive tension.

8.2.6. Public perception and civic conflict

In Erzsébetváros, cultural revitalization efforts are not unfolding within a neutral civic space. Instead, they are entangled in a landscape of polarized perception, fragmented dialogue, and epistemic breakdown, where even the most benign cultural initiatives are interpreted through lenses of suspicion, fatigue, or political antagonism. This tension reveals a deeper ontological instability in the civic realm in which shared meaning, trust, and communicability are no longer assumed.

“So, when we say that there will be an Easter preparation event for the community at Klauzál Square, they comment underneath saying 'go to hell', because people have vomited in the doorway there recently.”

This visceral reaction, directed at a family-friendly activity, illustrates the collapse of semantic clarity and relational empathy. The event itself is not the source of grievance; rather, it becomes a symbolic proxy for broader frustrations with litter, tourism, or governance that remain unaddressed through formal channels. This is a clear case of epistemic misalignment: cultural workers attempt to offer meaning and connection, but are met with hostility rooted in unrelated, often unarticulated affective burdens.

From a phenomenological perspective, these interactions register as forms of emotional exhaustion. Cultural staff described a sense of blurred boundaries where their roles are conflated with political identities, and their work is misinterpreted as agenda-driven, even when it is overtly inclusive or apolitical.

“We are public utilities... I am very happy to answer everything, but I am not the municipality... and I cannot find a connection between the cultural event and their anger.”

Here, we see the erosion of role legibility in which civic actors are no longer understood for what they do, but perceived through abstracted positions within contested symbolic orders. This contributes to what might be called ontological defensiveness: a state in which public-facing workers begin to anticipate misinterpretation, shielding themselves from vulnerability and reducing their openness to co-creation.

“Locals playing a role in shaping civil resistance are not willing to engage in dialogue.”

The recurrence of politically motivated resistance—often personalized and detached from present programmatic content—signals a historical sedimentation of mistrust. Certain civil groups become performative spaces of grievance, rather than platforms for deliberation. The potential for civic imagination, the co-creation of futures, is thus narrowed by affective inertia and legacy polarization.

From an anthropological lens, this dynamic can be read as a ritualized civic deadlock which is a repeated pattern of conflict without resolution, where roles are performed but not reconfigured. Without alternative forums for relational governance, the loudest and least collaborative voices dominate the discourse, often via unmoderated digital platforms.

“We joined their Facebook group... but whatever we post, it’s just backlash. Everything reacts like this.”

This reflects the epistemic asymmetry of digital space. Online groups serve as echo chambers, amplifying negativity while flattening nuance. The absence of structured civic forums such as town halls, listening sessions, deliberative assemblies prevents the emergence of what political theorists might call agonistic pluralism: spaces where conflict is acknowledged but made productive through rules of recognition, empathy, and iteration.

Despite this, cultural actors still articulate a desire for relational repair and dialogic governance:

“I believe... that nothing can be achieved through aggression. Through dialogue, teamwork, and establishing collaborations... small results can be achieved slowly.”

This appeal signals an ontological commitment to co-presence and mutual becoming that cultural life is not delivered but composed through trust, responsiveness, and joint authorship. However, for this potential to be realized, institutional and spatial infrastructures for dialogue must be reimagined.

This reimagining is crucial to the future of creative tourism as co-creation. Without civic trust and local legitimacy, efforts to involve tourists in participatory culture risk further alienating residents. Conversely, if place-based storytelling, art, and celebration are grounded in inclusive civic frameworks, they can serve as shared spaces of encounter where locals and visitors co-construct meanings of place rather than competing over them.

Ultimately, the current polarization reveals more than resistance; it exposes a crisis in urban epistemology and belonging. In response, institutions must act not only as cultural curators but as facilitators of civic sense-making, building new forms of engagement that are slow, dialogic, and structurally inclusive. Only then can Erzsébetváros transition from symbolic battlefield to relational commons, where culture becomes a medium for mutual recognition, rather than mutual misreading.

9. DISCUSSION

This chapter synthesizes the empirical findings presented in Chapter 8 through a critical, theoretically grounded lens, aiming to illuminate the broader implications of the study for tourism research, cultural governance, and urban policy. Drawing from the conceptual and philosophical foundations outlined in earlier chapters including ontological situatedness, epistemological perception, phenomenological experience, and anthropological meaning-making, it situates the results within ongoing academic and policy debates on tourism milieus, creative place-making, and sustainable urban transformation.

The discussion is structured to bridge the two empirical phases, integrating insights from both the visual and narrative diagnoses of the tourism milieu and the institutional perspectives of cultural actors navigating a tourism-saturated environment. Rather than treating these phases in isolation, this chapter weaves them together to reveal how perception, representation, institutional practice, and governance logic intersect to shape the lived realities and future trajectories of Budapest's District VII.

In revisiting the tourism milieu through the lens of situated perception, the chapter reflects on how tourist-like observers and embedded stakeholders interpret the district's sensory, symbolic, and socio-political transformations. It then turns to the operational dilemmas faced by cultural institutions, analyzing how co-creative potential is constrained or enabled by systemic conditions. The final sections engage with theoretical and practical implications, proposing governance innovations and reflecting on the study's contribution to knowledge. Through this layered discussion, the chapter argues for a paradigm shift from extractive tourism models toward relational, place-based approaches rooted in dialogical planning and cultural care.

9.1.Revisiting the tourism milieu of District VII through situated perception

The empirical findings of Phase 1 reveal that the tourism milieu of District VII is not simply an aggregate of physical attributes or tourist attractions, but a dynamic, symbolically charged environment shaped through lived experience, visual framing, and ongoing discourse. Drawing from both visual content and stakeholder narratives, the study confirms that the milieu is constructed relationally by those who traverse it, imagine it, and work within it. This understanding aligns with the

conceptualisation of tourism milieu by Michalkó and Rátz (2006), who emphasize the simultaneity of spatial, social, and symbolic processes in shaping urban tourism experiences. The current findings, however, deepen this perspective by foregrounding the perceptual and affective dimensions that condition how District VII is made meaningful by different groups at different times.

The photographs captured by tourism students provide a compelling entry point into how first-time observers symbolically represent the district during daytime hours. Recurring motifs such as ruin bars, vibrant street art, the Great Synagogue, and dilapidated façades suggest a visual logic that privileges authenticity through aesthetic contradiction between decay and creativity. These images evoke a district that is at once playful and worn, layered with historical resonance yet animated by contemporary cultural energy. This visual semiotics supports the epistemological premise of the research model, in which individual perceptions shaped by cultural scripts and affective cues filter and mediate how tourism spaces are cognitively constructed. It also echoes the work of Pan et al. (2014) and Zhang et al. (2019), who show how user-generated visuals frame tourism destinations in selective, emotionally resonant ways.

Stakeholder interviews further complicate this visual landscape by introducing narrative layers of interpretation rooted in lived, embodied experience. Tourism professionals and local entrepreneurs articulated strong emotional responses to the district's transformation ranging from nostalgia and frustration to cautious optimism. For example, several interviewees described the area as becoming “*unlivable*” or “*a Disneyland*,” reflecting an acute awareness of how economic tourism development has destabilised community rhythms and spatial integrity. These reflections resonate with the phenomenological layer of the model, particularly in how stakeholders described their sensory engagement with space: the relentless noise of nightlife, the erosion of quiet residential streets, or the surreal juxtaposition of sacred sites with commercialized entertainment. Such accounts exemplify Merleau-Ponty’s (2012) notion that space is not merely seen, but inhabited through bodily presence and emotional orientation.

The analysis reveals not only individual perspectives but shared discourses that shape collective understandings of the tourism milieu. Many participants drew upon similar language and imagery when discussing challenges; terms like “*overload*,”

“fragmentation,” and *“loss of control”* repeatedly surfaced across interviews. These discourses are not isolated opinions but manifestations of what Larsen and Johnson (2012) describe as ontological situatedness: a recognition that place identities are socially produced and historically contingent. In this sense, the tourism milieu is both materially real and symbolically contested, a hybrid formation where official policies, media framings, and grassroots memories interact to co-produce meaning. The anthropological dimension of the model becomes particularly salient in discussions of identity and representation. Stakeholders expressed discomfort with how the label “Jewish Quarter” has been flattened into a tourist-friendly brand, disconnected from the district’s lived cultural history. This sentiment reflects broader debates in urban tourism scholarship around heritage commodification, memory politics, and the ethics of place marketing. It also supports Hall’s (2021) argument that place is a vessel of collective identity and struggle, constantly renegotiated through cultural and economic pressures.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the tourism milieu of District VII is shaped through a matrix of visual symbolism, narrative construction, sensory engagement, and ongoing discourse. These findings not only confirm existing literature on tourism milieus as hybrid socio-spatial constructs but extend it by offering a multi-sensory, temporally anchored, and philosophically grounded interpretation. The integration of visual data and stakeholder narratives allows for a richer understanding of how place is not merely consumed or managed, but co-constructed and emotionally inhabited. Moreover, the empirical evidence lends further weight to the conceptual model’s framing, particularly in how it synthesizes phenomenology, ontology, and anthropology to explain the layered nature of tourism space.

The contribution here lies in illustrating how individual and collective perceptions across visual and narrative domains create, reproduce, and contest the meaning of District VII. This reconceptualisation encourages a shift away from reductionist views of tourism impact towards a more relational, perception-driven understanding of how tourism reshapes urban identities. In doing so, the findings offer both theoretical refinement and practical insight for reimagining tourism development in Budapest and comparable urban districts worldwide.

9.2. Institutional reflexivity and creative governance in tourism-saturated districts

Phase 2 of the research turned analytical focus toward the institutional landscape of District VII specifically, municipally linked cultural actors operating at the intersection of placemaking, public service, and tourism management. Drawing on the insights of cultural program directors and staff, this section explores how cultural institutions interpret their mission, respond to pressures associated with nightlife tourism, and negotiate their role in shaping an alternative narrative for the district. Through this lens, cultural governance emerges as a reflexive, affective, and sometimes resistant engagement with the tourism milieu.

The interviews conducted in early 2025 revealed a shared institutional awareness of the asymmetries that define District VII's cultural ecosystem. While tourism continues to dominate the district's visual, economic, and symbolic landscape, cultural professionals described their work as oriented toward recalibrating this imbalance not through opposition, but through subtle reorientation. Their efforts align with the epistemological dimension of the conceptual model presented in Chapter 1, which recognizes that knowledge about place is constructed through socially situated practices, shaped by affect, memory, and institutional voice. Rather than resisting tourism in totality, cultural actors sought to modulate its tone and tempo, introducing forms of cultural expression that re-anchor the district within local rhythms and everyday life.

Several interviewees emphasized that their institutions serve as spaces of “*slowness*” and “*neighborhood connection*,” functioning as counterweights to the speed and saturation of the party economy. These initiatives reflect a conscious effort to cultivate a more grounded sense of place that is emotionally resonant and inclusive. The emphasis on sensory and symbolic recalibration connects with the phenomenological strand of the model, which views place as experienced bodily and atmospherically. Events such as baby music mornings, family concerts, or small exhibitions are not simply programmatic outputs but are interventions that reshape how the district is felt and navigated by both residents and visitors.

Yet, cultural reflexivity was not presented as frictionless. Participants repeatedly highlighted the institutional constraints under which they operate: unstable funding, jurisdictional fragmentation, limited political support, and the disproportionate

power of the nightlife sector. These barriers mirror structural critiques of Budapest's party tourism, which have pointed to the entrenchment of nightlife interests in local governance. As one cultural actor put it, "*we are tasked with softening something we don't control.*" This comment illustrates the critical realist undercurrent of the model: while meanings are constructed, they are constrained by deeper institutional and economic structures that condition the possibilities of cultural intervention.

Moreover, interviewees positioned their work as inherently dialogical. They did not see themselves as cultural authorities, but as facilitators of public co-creation, seeking to rebuild trust and re-engage a community that has grown weary of symbolic inclusion without material change. This perspective aligns with the anthropological dimension of the model, where culture is not a fixed heritage to be displayed, but a living, negotiated practice of belonging. Programs that include foreign residents, NGOs, or grassroots groups illustrate how cultural labor becomes a form of symbolic mediation as means of reweaving the fragmented social fabric left in the wake of gentrification and overtourism.

Institutional reflexivity, in this sense, becomes more than introspection. It becomes spatial and performative. It plays out in how events are timed to avoid nightlife peaks, how spaces are curated to invite intergenerational participation, and how visual language is used to signal inclusion rather than exclusivity. These practices not only engage with but reshape the tourism milieu as described by Michalkó and Rátz (2006), who conceptualize milieu as both a physical and symbolic landscape shaped through encounters. The findings from Phase 2 extend this idea by showing how institutions actively produce affective and ethical atmospheres, resisting reductive place-branding through small-scale, care-oriented interventions.

The findings from Phase 2 reaffirm and deepen the conceptual model developed in this dissertation. They reveal that cultural institutions in District VII do not merely operate within a tourism milieu, they contribute to its evolution. Through reflexive governance, creative improvisation, and symbolic labor, they re-situate place not only as a stage for consumption but as a shared cultural and emotional project. Their work highlights the importance of institutional care in cultivating sustainable urban tourism and shows how cultural governance can act as a transformative agent in tourism-saturated environments. These interventions though modest in scale function as what this dissertation defines as progressive elements: intentional

practices that reframe tourism not as a disruptive force but as a potential conduit for inclusive place-making. Rooted in the relational, affective, and dialogical ethos of creative tourism, these elements push the district beyond passive resilience toward active cultural stewardship. By fostering spaces of co-creation, slowing down the pace of consumption, and embedding symbolic meaning into everyday cultural routines, these actors seed new possibilities within the tourism milieu, possibilities that are more attuned to sustainability, social cohesion, and long-term livability to foster sense of place. Thus, institutional reflexivity becomes both a theoretical and practical mechanism for transitioning Budapest's Jewish Quarter from a party-centric destination into a plural, creative, and ethically anchored urban landscape.

9.3. Creative tourism as a relational strategy for rebalancing urban experience

The second phase of this study illuminated how cultural institutions operate under the dual pressure of fulfilling their community-focused missions while navigating the realities of tourism saturation in Budapest's District VII. Cultural actors consistently described their work as deeply relational and emotionally invested. Their narratives highlighted a vision of creative tourism not as a fixed product or commodified experience but as a relational, participatory strategy aimed at strengthening community ties, fostering symbolic coherence, and providing inclusive access to cultural life.

This vision aligns with the phenomenological and anthropological dimensions of the study's conceptual model, where place is experienced through emotion, engagement, and memory. Cultural work becomes a form of ontological care as a practice of maintaining continuity amid disruption and generating meaning within an environment where heritage and nightlife collide. By inviting both locals and visitors into co-created cultural activities, institutions attempt to recalibrate spatial narratives, soften tensions, and build inclusive publics around shared creativity.

However, as the findings revealed, this potential remains underleveraged. Constraints such as bureaucratic fragmentation, short-term funding cycles, and lack of strategic support inhibit the scale and coherence of creative initiatives. Nonetheless, cultural actors continue to enact "slow" forms of transformation fostering relational bonds, intergenerational dialogues, and symbolic resistance to the homogenizing effects of party tourism.

These actions represent progressive elements within the broader tourism milieu as small but significant efforts that signal a shift in the ontological situatedness of the district. Whereas the party tourism model positions the Jewish Quarter as a consumable, hedonistic zone, the emergence of co-creative practices begins to redefine its identity as a space of emotional resonance, memory, and collaboration. As creative tourism initiatives embed themselves more deeply into the district's rhythms, they begin to alter the epistemology of place: that is, how individuals know, interpret, and interact with the urban environment. Tourists no longer just consume nightlife; they co-create meaning, participate in local narratives, and experience the district through alternative, more grounded modalities.

This evolution extends to the phenomenological experience of the district. Rather than being defined by sensory overload and transience, District VII has the potential to become a layered and emotionally durable space where locals and tourists alike can feel connection, orientation, and meaning. Over time, this reconfiguration may lead to a cultural reorientation in which creativity becomes the dominant interpretive frame of the district.

Moreover, the findings suggest that creativity is not something to be imported into the district. It already exists in rich and multifaceted forms. From grassroots community events to informal artistic expressions and longstanding cultural venues, the Jewish Quarter holds significant endogenous creative assets. What is needed is not invention, but activation and rechanneling: tapping into these local resources to design co-creative experiences that allow residents and tourists to participate meaningfully in the life of the district. By integrating visitors into community-oriented cultural workshops, co-curated exhibitions, and participatory festivals, the district can foster shared narratives of belonging, strengthening emotional bonds and mutual understanding.

Such initiatives have dual value: socially, they bridge divides between locals and tourists by cultivating empathy and shared authorship of place; economically, they offer new, sustainable tourism revenue streams that move beyond extractive nightlife models. This aligns with broader discourses on creative placemaking and urban resilience, where economic gain is not pursued at the expense of local identity, but emerges from it.

Ultimately, these progressive shifts reposition the Jewish Quarter's tourism milieu from one dominated by transient, nightlife-driven interactions to one defined by creative tourism anchored in participation, co-creation, and cultural depth. This transition is ontological, epistemological, and cultural. It signals a rebalancing of how space is known, lived, and imagined, and sets the groundwork for a more inclusive, adaptive, and meaningful future for both residents and visitors.

9.4. Implications for urban tourism governance and policy

The findings of this study highlight the urgent need for more integrated, reflexive, and participatory approaches to urban tourism governance in Budapest's District VII. As both empirical phases demonstrated, the tourism milieu is not only a result of tourist flows or market dynamics; it is deeply entangled with governance decisions, policy frameworks, and institutional cultures. The current governance model characterized by fragmentation, inertia, and short-termism has contributed to the unchecked expansion of party tourism and the marginalization of cultural and community-centered alternatives.

One of the most consistent themes emerging from interviews with both tourism stakeholders and cultural actors was a sense of strategic disconnection: between different levels of governance (municipal, district, national), between policy rhetoric and implementation, and between tourism management and cultural planning. Despite widespread recognition of the social costs of party tourism including noise complaints, displacement, and the erosion of community life, there has been little structural change. This disjuncture reflects not only institutional barriers but also a limited epistemological framing of tourism as an economic sector, rather than as a cultural and spatial phenomenon embedded in lived urban realities.

The study's critical realist orientation draws attention to the underlying causal mechanisms that perpetuate this disjuncture: bureaucratic silos, inadequate participatory channels, absence of shared metrics for evaluating tourism's social impact, and a lack of long-term, place-based visioning. Addressing these root causes requires more than reactive policy instruments, it necessitates a paradigm shift in how tourism is governed.

One promising direction, already hinted at by institutional actors in Phase 2, is the creation of cross-governmental structures that bridge district-level realities with citywide infrastructure planning and national cultural policies. A dedicated cultural taskforce comprising representatives from Erzsébetváros municipality, Budapest's urban service providers, and national agencies could enable greater alignment and reduce the fragmentation of authority that currently hinders cohesive action. Creative tourism should be institutionalized not just as an economic opportunity, but as a strategic orientation capable of aligning tourism development with social and cultural sustainability goals.

A further implication concerns the need to expand and secure sustainable cultural funding mechanisms. Cultural institutions in the district often compete with basic services for limited resources. Establishing a dedicated urban culture fund, earmarked for public art, greening, and inclusive cultural events, could insulate progressive programming from political volatility and ensure long-term continuity. At the same time, private sponsorship models such as partnerships with local businesses impacted by tourism could foster co-ownership and embed culture more deeply into the district's socio-economic ecosystem.

Effective governance also requires active community engagement. This study found cultural professionals advocating for more inclusive design processes and deeper social anchoring of their programs. A practical mechanism to operationalize this would be the creation of a Cultural Ambassadors Program, where residents including young people and foreign nationals co-create and promote local events. Such initiatives build trust, expand demographic reach, and help mediate tensions between tourism and everyday life.

Additionally, public communication and destination branding should move beyond the "party district" image and foreground the area's rich cultural layers, historical complexity, and creative assets. This rebranding must be participatory and reflect the voices of those who live, work, and create in the district.

Finally, the findings highlight a significant gap in stakeholder dialogue. Although tourism professionals, cultural actors, business owners, and civil society groups often voice overlapping concerns, there is a striking absence of shared planning spaces. Facilitating structured, ongoing dialogue platforms can create a relational infrastructure for rebuilding trust, aligning priorities, and co-producing sustainable

solutions. This is essential not only for governance efficiency but for repositioning the tourism milieu itself moving from a fragmented party-tourism model toward a participatory, culturally grounded, and co-creative urban identity.

Aligning governance frameworks with the philosophical and empirical insights of this study particularly its emphasis on ontological situatedness, epistemological nuance, and cultural complexity offers a path forward. District VII can be reframed not as a tourism problem to be managed, but as a living urban environment where inclusive creativity, heritage, and community engagement shape the future of sustainable tourism.

10. CONCLUSION

This final chapter brings together the empirical, theoretical, and practical threads of the dissertation, offering a synthetic reflection on the key contributions and implications of the research. By revisiting the original research questions and aims, the chapter demonstrates how the study has advanced understanding of the tourism milieu in Budapest's District VII both as a lived urban condition and as a conceptual model. The chapter articulates how individual and collective perceptions, symbolic representations, and institutional dynamics intersect in the co-production of tourism space. It highlights the study's contributions to urban tourism theory, cultural planning, and governance, while also acknowledging methodological limitations and identifying productive avenues for future research. The conclusion ultimately argues for a paradigmatic shift: from extractive tourism logics to co-creative, culturally grounded, and socially inclusive tourism futures.

10.1. Restating the research focus

This dissertation critically engages with the evolving tourism landscape of Budapest's District VII, commonly referred to as the Jewish Quarter characterized by its vibrant cultural heritage, dense urban fabric, and global reputation as a nightlife hub. As the district experiences mounting pressures from overtourism and party-driven urban development, this study investigates how tourism is symbolically constructed, experientially perceived, and institutionally managed. The central inquiry revolves around whether, and how, tourism in the area can transition toward more inclusive, creative, and sustainable futures.

The primary aim of this PhD dissertation is to explore how the tourism milieu of Budapest's Jewish Quarter is perceived, constructed, and governed, and to develop context-sensitive strategies that reposition the district's tourism trajectory toward more culturally grounded, socially inclusive, and creatively co-produced forms of tourism. By analyzing visual-symbolic representations, stakeholder narratives, and institutional reflexivity, the study interrogates the disjuncture between tourism development and community well-being, and evaluates the potential of creative tourism as a transformative policy and planning paradigm.

The research was guided by an interpretivist and constructivist paradigm, complemented by a critical realist ontology. These philosophical commitments

enabled a nuanced investigation of how the tourism milieu is co-constructed both through perception and governance; and how alternative models such as creative tourism might offer progressive shifts toward more sustainable and participatory futures.

Empirically, the inquiry was structured in two interlinked phases. Phase 1 investigated the perceptual and experiential dimensions of the tourism milieu, combining visual content analysis of student-generated photographs with semi-structured interviews with tourism professionals, entrepreneurs, and public-sector stakeholders. Phase 2 shifted the analytical lens to institutional reflexivity, drawing on in-depth interviews with cultural program directors and staff working in municipally supported cultural institutions. Across both phases, inductive thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns, tensions, and opportunities, ensuring that the findings were grounded in the situated perspectives of diverse actors embedded in the district.

This dissertation was guided by one overarching research question for each empirical phase, with corresponding subquestions tailored to the specific methodological design and analytical focus of each study.

Phase 1: Exploratory - Perception and Representation

RQ1: *How is the tourism milieu of Budapest's Jewish Quarter currently constructed, perceived, and symbolically represented through the visual practices of tourist-like observers and the experiential accounts of tourism professionals, entrepreneurs, and public-sector stakeholders embedded in the district, and what practical and theoretical possibilities exist for its future repositioning?*

Sub-questions:

- **RQ1.1:** What recurring visual motifs, spatial elements, and symbolic representations characterize the daytime tourism milieu of the Jewish Quarter, as captured by tourism students simulating first-time visitors?
- **RQ1.2:** How do tourism professionals, business operators, and public-sector actors describe the socio-cultural transformations underway in the Jewish Quarter?

- **RQ1.3:** What short and long-term tensions do these stakeholders identify between tourism-led development and the preservation of local community identity, cultural authenticity, and everyday livability?
- **RQ1.4:** What creative or alternative tourism models do these stakeholders view as feasible or desirable for enhancing the district's sustainability, inclusivity, and cultural distinctiveness?

Phase 2: Explanatory - Institutional Reflexivity

RQ2: *How do cultural program directors and staff working in municipally supported institutions in District VII interpret and respond to the challenges and opportunities of managing cultural work in a tourism-saturated urban environment?*

Sub-questions:

- **RQ2.1:** How do these cultural actors currently define their institutional mission and role in shaping urban identity and mitigating tourism-related disruptions within a district dominated by nightlife tourism?
- **RQ2.2:** What operational, financial, bureaucratic, or political constraints are described by cultural institutions as limiting their ability to develop community-focused or participatory tourism initiatives?
- **RQ2.3:** In what ways do these actors describe their cultural programming as a form of placemaking, symbolic mediation, or resistance in response to tourism saturation and civic discontent from local residents?

Next section synthesizes the findings that emerged across the two phases of research.

10.2. Key Findings and synthesis

The empirical findings of this dissertation reveal a complex and multilayered tourism milieu within Budapest's District VII where symbolic representations, lived experiences, and institutional responses converge and conflict. Across both phases of the research, key tensions, contradictions, and openings for transformation emerged, illustrating how the district's tourism landscape is not fixed, but continuously co-produced through perception, affect, and governance.

In the first phase, the visual content generated by tourism students revealed a recurring visual grammar of the district: vibrant ruin bar façades, colorful murals, street food, Jewish heritage markers, and cool urban streets. These images reflected

a daytime tourism milieu dominated by surface-level attractions, street-level ambiance, and aesthetic contradictions. The visual emphasis on authenticity, creativity, and "urban coolness" coexisted with depictions of wear, disorder, and neglect suggesting a symbolic terrain shaped as much by nostalgia as by commodification.

What was absent, however, was equally telling: few photographs captured residential life, public infrastructure, or community interaction. The district was primarily rendered as a consumable spectacle, echoing prior critiques of Budapest's ruin bar tourism (Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019). Yet, this aestheticized representation also masked the underlying socio-cultural complexities of the area. These findings confirm Michalkó and Rátz's (2008) observation that tourism milieus are constructed through both tangible and intangible layers. Here, architecture and signage were as influential as mood, memory, and sensory impression.

The epistemological lens of the model is especially relevant in this phase: student photographers acting as tourist-like observers filtered the district through symbolic cues and personal cognitive expectations. These visual outputs contributed to the discursive construction of place, reinforcing dominant narratives while excluding others. Such representations are not neutral; they shape how tourists navigate, consume, and emotionally relate to the urban environment (Degen and Rose, 2012).

Interviews with tourism professionals, entrepreneurs, and public-sector stakeholders revealed a shared recognition of the district's rapid transformation over the last decade. Many described how the once-local nightlife scene had become globalized, hyper-commercialized, and unmoored from the community. Stakeholders across the spectrum entrepreneurs, tour guides, and cultural managers acknowledged the economic value of tourism, but also conveyed growing fatigue, spatial saturation, and loss of social cohesion.

Additionally, stakeholders identified tensions between short-term tourism profit and long-term community well-being. Interviewees spoke of rising rents, noise complaints, deteriorating infrastructure, and governance paralysis. These experiences show the ontological situatedness of tourism place: actors perceive and navigate the same space differently based on their social roles, economic interests, and temporal engagement (Massey, 2005). For some, the district is a commercial asset; for others, it is a site of emotional loss and social rupture.

Despite these tensions, the findings revealed emerging progressive elements. Multiple respondents expressed support for creative or alternative forms of tourism such as guided walks, food and craft festivals, or participatory heritage programming that could reframe the district's appeal. These proposals were not abstract; they reflected situated knowledge and lived frustrations, paired with imaginative engagement.

Phase 2 extended the inquiry into the domain of cultural institutions. Interviews with cultural program directors and staff revealed a high level of institutional reflexivity: these actors were acutely aware of tourism saturation and its cultural implications. Rather than seeing themselves outside the tourism system, many viewed their work as symbolic mediation counterbalancing the party narrative with programming centered on memory, dialogue, and inclusivity.

Participants described various constraints such as limited funding, bureaucratic friction, and lack of coordinated governance that inhibited their capacity to expand community-focused cultural work. Yet they also shared efforts to reposition cultural programming as a form of place-making and resistance, aiming to sustain emotional connection, creative participation, and local narratives within an environment of commercial dominance.

Notably, they were already experimenting with co-creative tourism models, inviting locals and visitors to participate in workshops, or site-specific interventions. These activities were not framed as products but as dialogic processes that sought to reweave social and spatial relations in the district.

When viewed holistically, the empirical findings point to a tourism milieu that is deeply fragmented yet holds latent potential for transformation. Across visual outputs, stakeholder narratives, and institutional insights, a pattern emerges: while the dominant image of the district is tied to nightlife, consumption, and spectacle, there exists a quieter current of creative reimagining, cultural care, and social negotiation.

These findings confirm that sense of place in District VII is neither stable nor singular. Some stakeholders expressed detachment, alienation, or nostalgia; others articulated new forms of belonging tied to cultural work, neighborhood engagement, or intergenerational collaboration. The tourism milieu, then, is best understood as a

layered and contested field of perception co-constructed through affect, policy, memory, and market forces.

This reinforces the utility of the multi-layered tourism milieu model developed in the dissertation, which integrates:

- **Ontological situatedness** (Massey, 2005): differences in how place is experienced and inhabited;
- **Epistemological framing**: the discursive and symbolic construction of place meaning;
- **Phenomenological engagement** (Merleau-Ponty, 2012): how the milieu is sensorially and affectively experienced;
- **Anthropological mediation** (Hall, 2021): the labor of memory, care, and identity maintenance.

The synthesis of individual and collective perceptions, institutional constraints, and imaginative alternatives leads to a key insight: District VII's tourism future remains open-ended. It is not inevitably bound to its "party district" identity. Through dialogic governance, co-creative programming, and narrative reorientation, the district could be repositioned operationally, symbolically, and ontologically as a site of creative tourism. Such a shift would demand institutional reform, funding mechanisms, and cultural integration, but also a deeper commitment to seeing tourism as place-making rather than extraction.

This repositioning aligns with the model's progressive dimension: as the tourism milieu evolves, its ontological frame changes (who belongs, who participates), its epistemology shifts (how it is perceived and portrayed), and its phenomenology deepens (how it is sensorially and socially experienced). In this transformation, culture becomes a vehicle for inclusion, not commodification.

The progressive transformation of the tourism milieu would not only benefit residents and cultural actors but would also enhance the visitor experience, offering more grounded, participatory, and affectively resonant engagements. Through co-creative festivals, workshops, and heritage practices, tourists could become co-authors of place, not just consumers of spectacle.

10.3. Theoretical contributions

This dissertation makes significant contributions to tourism studies, urban geography, and cultural planning by expanding the theoretical framework of the tourism milieu and situating creative tourism as a progressive response to urban tourism saturation. Drawing from the empirical complexities of Budapest's District VII, it refines foundational concepts through philosophical alignment, narrative insight, and multi-actor perspectives. The study especially contributes to understanding how tourism spaces are co-produced through perception, governance, and cultural meaning, offering both a reconceptualization of existing models and a new, integrative analytical lens.

The most substantial theoretical contribution lies in expanding the tourism milieu model initially developed by Michalkó and Rátz (2006, 2008). While earlier work defined the tourism milieu as the spatial and functional environment enabling tourism activity, this dissertation advances the concept by embedding it within a multidimensional philosophical framework that includes ontological, epistemological, phenomenological, and anthropological lenses.

The tourism milieu is reconceptualized as a relational and emergent spatial field that is co-shaped by individual and collective perceptions, affective engagements, symbolic meanings, and governance structures. This study positions the tourism milieu as more than a context for tourism, it is a living, contested, and co-authored space.

Inspired by Massey (2005), ontological situatedness frames place not as a bounded container but as a relational and processual entity, constantly redefined through interaction, mobility, and contestation. Stakeholders within District VII perceive and navigate the district differently depending on their positionality and lived history. This ontological grounding allows the model to account for the fragmented yet coexisting realities that shape tourism dynamics.

Epistemology of place addresses how knowledge about the district is mediated and symbolically filtered through social media, branding, cultural memory, and institutional discourse. The study shows how ruin bars, for instance, evolved from subcultural enclaves to commodified tourism icons, shifting the district's meaning. These visual and cognitive filters alter not only how the space is understood but how

it is acted upon, reinforcing or challenging dominant narratives (Zátori and Smith, 2014; Pinke-Sziva et al., 2019).

Grounded in phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 2012; Seamon, 2015), experiential modalities foreground the embodied, emotional, and sensory experiences of the tourism milieu. The research documents both negative affect such as sensory overload, disorientation, and alienation and positive affect, including creative engagement, urban curiosity, and emotional resonance during participatory events or cultural activities. These modalities reflect the ambivalence of the tourism experience in District VII and underscore how place is felt, not just known or seen.

The fourth dimension focuses on symbolic labor, collective memory, and cultural identity. Drawing from Hall (2021) and the broader anthropological tradition, this layer illuminates how institutions, residents, and creators perform cultural continuity, negotiate heritage, and struggle for meaning in a transforming district. Cultural actors in the study are shown to play curatorial roles, mediating between past and future, local and global, memory and commodification. Their work serves as both resistance and reinvention.

Together, these layers offer a reworked tourism milieu model that is simultaneously:

- Perceptual – shaped by what is seen, remembered, and narrated
- Experiential – informed by what is felt and embodied
- Institutional – structured through planning, regulation, and funding
- Symbolic – constituted by identity, belonging, and historical meaning.

By acknowledging the individual and collective perceptions within this framework, the study shows that the tourism milieu is not merely a container for tourism activity. It is a site of ongoing cultural negotiation, constantly shaped and reshaped through discourse, emotion, and power. This lens enables a theoretically rich and empirically grounded understanding of how spaces like the Jewish Quarter evolve, fragment, and sometimes transform.

Building on this reframed tourism milieu, the study advances creative tourism by situating it not just as an economic niche, but as a philosophical and planning paradigm. Creative tourism in District VII is emerging through grassroots innovation, institutional resilience, and cultural curation, not simply as a product, but

as a mode of placemaking and co-creation (Richards and Raymond, 2000; Duxbury and Richards, 2019).

This research affirms previous scholarship that links creative tourism with sense of place, emotional connection, and sustainability (Vidal González, 2008; Della Lucia and Trunfio, 2018), but makes a novel contribution by showing how creative tourism can operate as a reparative framework rebuilding affective and cultural meaning in districts saturated by extractive tourism. Co-creative events, neighborhood-based programming, and participatory arts initiatives are revealed as progressive elements, incipient but potent forces capable of reorienting the tourism milieu toward more inclusive, dialogic, and situated forms of engagement.

This model of creative tourism extends the current literature by integrating ontological, epistemological, and experiential shifts arguing that tourism can be a mode of cultural production and collective authorship, not merely consumption.

The dissertation also contributes to tourism studies in post-socialist contexts, a field still under-theorized in global urban tourism debates. District VII illustrates how urban transformation in cities like Budapest is shaped by the tensions between neoliberal restructuring, historical memory, and emergent creativity. The rapid shift from ruin bar experimentation to nightlife monoculture echoes broader trends in Eastern Europe, where informal cultural spaces are often co-opted or commercialized (Smith et al., 2019; Mérai and Kulikov, 2024).

Yet, this study complicates those trajectories by showing how symbolic resistance, community resilience, and creative reactivation persist even under pressure. Through institutional work and civic imagination, new senses of place emerge rooted in care, participation, and cultural continuity.

Finally, the study advocates for a more situated, reflexive, and participatory tourism theory. It challenges models that view tourism solely through market, visitor, or destination lenses. Instead, it proposes a conceptual framework where tourism is understood as a shared social practice, entangled with power, memory, and emotion.

The revised tourism milieu model with its layered, affective, and perceptual orientation offers a relational tool for future studies across tourism geographies. By centering progressive elements like co-creation, civic hospitality, and emotional sustainability, the model moves toward a more dialogic, inclusive, and place-sensitive paradigm of urban tourism development.

10.4. Methodological contributions

This dissertation makes an important methodological contribution by operationalizing a multi-scalar, multi-method, and reflexive research design that is both philosophically grounded and context-sensitive. The study demonstrates how interpretivist, constructivist, and critical realist paradigms can be integrated into a cohesive methodological framework to investigate complex tourism phenomena in rapidly transforming urban spaces.

The two-phased empirical structure combining visual content analysis and semi-structured interviews in Phase 1, followed by institutional interviews in Phase 2 enabled a layered exploration of the tourism milieu of Budapest's District VII. This design allowed for the synthesis of individual and collective perceptions, material-symbolic representations, and institutional reflexivity, going beyond surface-level discourse to uncover deeper socio-spatial tensions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Sayer, 2000). By capturing the interplay of imagery, lived experience, and governance cultures, the study responds to calls for more holistic and participatory approaches in tourism research (Della Lucia and Trunfio, 2018; Duxbury, 2021).

A key methodological innovation lies in the use of visual content analysis to access affective and symbolic dimensions of place, particularly through the lens of simulated tourist observers. Drawing on phenomenological and sensory geographies (Merleau-Ponty, 2012; Degen and Rose, 2012), this approach highlighted how space is felt, encoded, and narrated through imagery, offering insights into the atmospheric and emotional registers of overtourism. This method extends prior tourism studies that have typically focused on interviews or quantitative visitor data, demonstrating the value of integrating visuality and affect into tourism milieu analysis (Pan et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2019).

In Phase 2, the study foregrounded institutional reflexivity by engaging cultural professionals and program directors as critical interpreters of urban change. Rather than treating institutions as static entities, the research approached them as symbolic and affective actors, whose constraints and potentials reflect broader governance dynamics. This methodological choice aligns with ethnographic traditions in urban and cultural planning (Clifford and Marcus, 1986), emphasizing how knowledge is co-produced, politically situated, and embedded in everyday cultural labor.

The dissertation also contributes to qualitative methodology by employing constructivist grounded theory principles not in a formal coding sequence, but as a flexible and iterative analytical strategy. Themes emerged inductively through cycles of immersion, coding, and synthesis, in line with Charmaz's (2006) emphasis on emergent meaning-making, researcher reflexivity, and layered interpretation. While not claiming full adherence to grounded theory procedures, the study demonstrates how its ethos can inform critical and place-sensitive tourism research without sacrificing philosophical coherence.

Finally, the philosophical alignment between methods and epistemology particularly the emphasis on perception, situated knowledge, and ontological complexity strengthens the study's internal consistency and analytical depth. By grounding methodological choices in clearly articulated paradigms (Bhaskar, 2008; Danermark et al., 2019), the research models how qualitative tourism inquiry can remain both empirically rigorous and theoretically ambitious, capable of producing insights that are relevant for policy, theory, and practice.

10.5. Practical contributions

This dissertation offers substantive practical implications for urban tourism governance, cultural planning, and place-based policy in Budapest and comparable tourism-saturated cities. While theoretical in its grounding, the study was designed to generate important insights for urban practitioners, municipal authorities, cultural institutions, and tourism developers seeking to transition from extractive nightlife tourism toward more inclusive, creative, and socially sustainable tourism futures.

The practical significance of the research lies in its ability to:

- Expose gaps in current governance and planning frameworks,
- Articulate co-created strategies grounded in lived experience and institutional practice,
- Offer a new vocabulary and set of metrics for reframing tourism beyond economic outputs.

The study reveals that tourism in District VII is not only shaped by consumer demand, but by institutional cultures, policy fragmentation, and a narrow economic lens that sidelines social and cultural dimensions. Current governance is marked by a strategic disconnection between levels of authority (district, municipal, national),

a lack of coordinated vision, and minimal participatory input from those most affected residents, cultural workers, and small-scale entrepreneurs.

The research calls for a shift in governance logic from control and containment to dialogue, alignment, and reflexivity. Tourism governance should be understood as a form of cultural practice that produces meaning, affects place identity, and structures lived experience. This reframing opens the door to cross-sectoral collaboration and the design of civic forums that include culture, planning, transport, housing, and economic development actors.

Through its empirical focus on cultural institutions and program leaders, the study demonstrates that District VII already holds untapped creative capital. These actors often under-resourced and institutionally marginalized are performing quiet but powerful roles in rebalancing the district's tourism milieu. Their work is not only artistic but spatial, emotional, and civic. By formally embedding creative tourism principles into local and city-level tourism strategies, policymakers can:

- Recognize cultural institutions as active placemakers, not passive heritage assets,
- Incentivize co-creative tourism formats such as participatory festivals, community art, or neighborhood-based storytelling,
- Align urban development incentives with sense of place, social inclusion, and cultural continuity.

This approach mirrors emerging international best practices (OECD, 2014; Duxbury and Richards, 2019), repositioning creative tourism as a policy lever, not just a market segment.

The research makes a strong case for expanding resident and frontline stakeholder participation in tourism planning. While party tourism has eroded community trust, the study finds significant latent capacity for civic engagement, especially when participation is framed around shared values like cultural memory, environmental quality, and neighborhood identity. Practically, this calls for the implementation of:

- Multi-stakeholder design labs co-hosted by district and city planners,
- A Cultural Ambassadors program where residents help curate tourism initiatives,
- Participatory budgeting mechanisms for tourism-related infrastructure.

These models support the broader vision of relational governance, in which communities are not only consulted, but empowered as co-authors of the tourism narrative.

Tourism in District VII is currently dominated by a “party district” imaginary, shaped by nightlife economies and global branding. However, the findings demonstrate growing appetite among visitors and locals alike for deeper, more dialogic, and culturally meaningful engagement.

This calls for a place-based narrative reset, grounded in the district’s emotional landscapes, cultural history, and creative potential. Policy implications include:

- Curating new communication campaigns that foreground cultural hybridity, memory, and creativity,
- Supporting place-sensitive branding through co-created storytelling and local content production,
- Reducing over-reliance on visitor metrics by adopting qualitative indicators such as place attachment, satisfaction, and civic engagement.

This repositioning supports a creative tourism milieu that is ontologically different inviting tourists into relationships of mutual recognition, rather than consumption.

Finally, the research outlines infrastructural and institutional interventions to operationalize these shifts:

- A Cross-Governmental Cultural Taskforce to align regulatory bodies and reduce bureaucratic fragmentation,
- A Dedicated Urban Culture Fund to finance community-oriented programming, greening, and public art,
- Private-public sponsorship schemes for tourism initiatives that demonstrate social value,
- Longitudinal evaluation tools based on sense of place, emotional resonance, and cultural vitality, rather than just overnight stays.

These recommendations emerge from empirical data, not abstraction. They represent feasible and context-sensitive responses that, if implemented, could begin to heal the disconnect between tourism and community, culture and commerce.

The practical insights of this dissertation call for a fundamental rethinking of tourism’s purpose and practice. In District VII and beyond, tourism must evolve from

a model of extraction to one of stewardship where meaning, memory, and mobility are co-managed for the benefit of all.

Rather than resisting tourism altogether, this research advocates for transforming its terms: from nightlife to narrative, from spectatorship to co-creation, and from infrastructure to relational infrastructure. When grounded in cultural sustainability and governed through shared authorship, tourism can become a vehicle of belonging, not displacement, a means of reinforcing what makes cities worth visiting and living in.

10.6. Limitations of the dissertation and future research directions

This doctoral study, while offering a multidimensional investigation into the evolving tourism milieu of Budapest's District VII, is shaped by several limitations both methodological and epistemological. These limitations do not diminish the value of the findings but instead serve to clarify the scope of the research and point toward avenues for future inquiry.

One of the key methodological constraints lies in the sample composition. The research prioritised the perspectives of tourism professionals, cultural actors, entrepreneurs, and public-sector stakeholders embedded in the district. This decision was aligned with the study's aim to understand the institutional, strategic, and representational dynamics shaping the tourism milieu. However, the absence of long-term resident voices and actual tourists means that certain experiential dimensions particularly those related to community displacement, intergenerational memory, or visitor affect remain underexplored. Future studies would benefit from incorporating the narratives of local inhabitants, minority groups, and everyday users of space to reveal the fuller spectrum of place-based attachment, exclusion, and negotiation.

Temporally, the fieldwork was conducted during a specific post-pandemic window when the effects of tourism saturation were still being recalibrated. The findings thus reflect a transitional moment, shaped by both residual overtourism patterns and emergent policy experimentation. Urban tourism, however, is a continuously evolving phenomenon, particularly in contested and gentrifying neighbourhoods like District VII. Longitudinal research tracking shifts in policy, perception, and cultural practice over time would offer critical insight into the durability, reversibility, or transformation of tourism impacts and stakeholder responses.

Geographically, the study is contextually embedded in Budapest's Jewish Quarter, a neighbourhood marked by the specificities of post-socialist urban transition, cultural commodification, and nightlife-driven development. While the theoretical model of the tourism milieu developed herein offers conceptual portability, its empirical grounding may not be directly generalisable to other settings without contextual adaptation. Future research could apply and test the expanded milieu model in comparable districts within Central and Eastern Europe thus enabling comparative analysis of tourism governance, symbolic economies, and cultural resistance across post-socialist urbanisms.

From an epistemological perspective, the study is guided by an interpretivist and constructivist paradigm, enriched by critical realism and phenomenological sensitivity. This allowed the research to attend closely to meaning-making, symbolic representation, and affective atmospheres. However, this lens necessarily places less emphasis on macroeconomic, geopolitical, or institutional power relations that also shape urban tourism dynamics. While governance fragmentation and policy inertia are addressed through stakeholder narratives, deeper political-economic analyses of tourism investment flows, land ownership, or municipal finance were beyond the study's scope. Future interdisciplinary research could merge this study's qualitative insights with spatial economics, urban political ecology, or regulatory studies to explore the material infrastructures underpinning tourism transformation.

Moreover, the photographic analysis in Phase 1 opens potential for further inquiry into digital and mediated place-making. The student-generated images offered a valuable snapshot of how the district is visually perceived, but further research could explore how District VII is represented across social media platforms, tourism marketing campaigns, or algorithmically generated itineraries. Such studies could illuminate how visual culture shapes collective imaginaries, spatial expectations, and tourist behavior thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the epistemological dynamics within the tourism milieu.

Finally, this dissertation has surfaced the emergence of progressive elements within the district's tourism landscape ranging from creative placemaking initiatives to care-based cultural programming. These elements remain fragile and often under-supported, but they represent a nascent shift in how tourism might be repositioned. Future research could build on this by conducting participatory action studies or pilot

interventions that involve co-designing festivals, workshops, or community narratives with local actors. Such applied research would not only generate empirical data but also test the viability of creative tourism as a transformative, inclusive, and sustainable strategy in overtouristed neighbourhoods.

While this study offers a rich interpretive account of tourism in Budapest's Jewish Quarter, it also invites continued exploration across disciplines, scales, and methods into how urban tourism can evolve beyond commodification, toward forms of engagement that are culturally rooted, socially responsive, and epistemologically inclusive.

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