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

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1. Research background and justification of the topic

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). 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 (Larsen and Johnson, 2012). 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.

1.1. 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.

1.2. 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 neighbourhoods 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.

1.3. 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 Jewish Quarter, 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.

1.4. 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 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 Zátori 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.

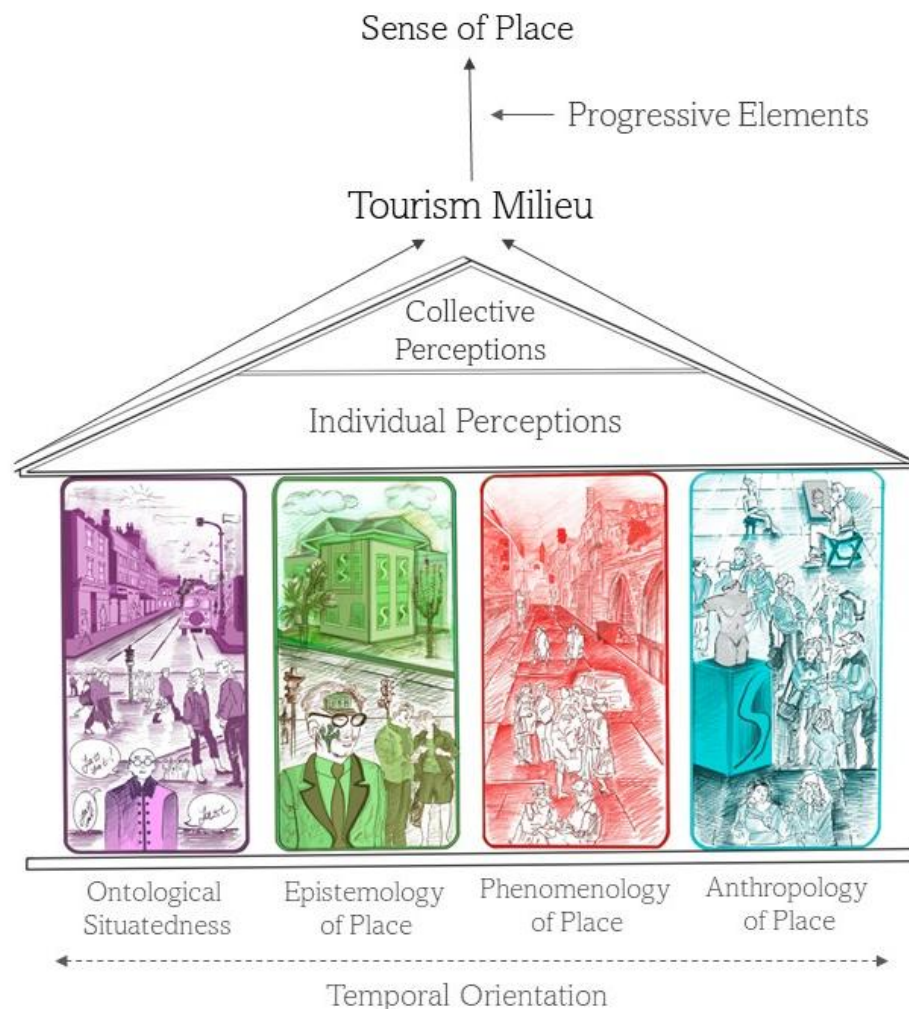


Figure 1: The conceptual framework of the study.
Source: Author's own construction. Graphic Designer: Bal, Zeynep Yagmur.

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.

2. The methods used

2.1. Philosophical and epistemological positioning

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 (Merleau-Ponty, 2012; Edensor, 2001; Degen and Rose, 2012). 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.

2.2. Research design overview

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.

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 through inductive thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework and supported by NVivo 15 software. Interviews are approached 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.

Table 1: 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?
Autumn 2021	Semi-structured interviews	Inductive thematic analysis (NVivo 15)	10 tourism stakeholders (entrepreneurs, professionals, public-sector actors)	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?
				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?

Source: Author's own work, 2025.

Table 2: 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?

Source: Author’s own work, 2025.

3. Scientific results of the dissertation (in bullet points)

The dissertation advances several novel empirical and theoretical findings, summarized below as the key scientific results of the research.

- The visual materials produced by tourism students revealed a recurring visual grammar of Inner Erzsébetváros, dominated by ruin bars, murals, street food, and Jewish heritage markers. These images framed the district as an “urban cool” milieu that mixed authenticity, creativity, and nostalgia with disorder and neglect, showing how tourists consume the place through symbolic cues.
- Interviews with entrepreneurs, tour guides, and cultural managers showed a shared awareness of the district’s rapid transformation. Stakeholders recognized the economic benefits of tourism, yet described fatigue, over-saturation, and loss of social cohesion as nightlife became globalized and detached from the local community.
- Stakeholders identified growing tensions between short-term profit and long-term livability, citing rising rents, noise complaints, deteriorating infrastructure, and governance paralysis as central concerns. This highlighted how the same urban space is experienced differently as commercial asset, cultural resource, or site of emotional loss.
- Despite these tensions, several respondents proposed alternative tourism models that could diversify the district’s appeal and restore community well-being.
- Cultural program directors expressed a high degree of reflexivity, acknowledging the saturation effects of tourism and deliberately seeking to counterbalance the party narrative with initiatives grounded in memory, inclusivity, and dialogue.
- The study revealed institutional revitalization strategies that positioned cultural programming as epistemic resistance against the reductive “party district” image. Concerts, family events, and street art were deployed to generate alternative atmospheres of intimacy, care, and belonging.
- Cultural institutions demonstrated an ethic of care, understanding their role not as administrative but as ontological stewardship anchoring continuity, protecting local narratives, and sustaining community connections amid tourism-driven disruption.
- Community engagement practices were found to be horizontal and participatory, particularly through partnerships with schools and kindergartens. This distributed

model ensured that cultural programs reflected everyday needs, though outreach to transient populations such as youth, renters, and migrants remained underdeveloped.

- The research identified structural and regulatory constraints that limited cultural transformation. Institutions lacked jurisdiction over nightlife venues, struggled with insufficient policing support, faced prohibitive costs for interventions (e.g., murals, tree planting), and navigated complex bureaucracies, which forced them into symbolic rather than structural action.
- The findings highlight cultural identity tensions, particularly around the contested label “Jewish Quarter.” While widely used in tourism branding, local actors resisted its essentializing effects, emphasizing plural and evolving identities rooted in contemporary lived experience rather than fixed heritage narratives.
- Interviews revealed civic polarization and mistrust, where even inclusive cultural events were met with hostility in public forums. This reflects a breakdown of civic dialogue in which cultural initiatives are often interpreted through antagonistic political lenses, reducing the possibility of co-creation.
- Despite these challenges, institutions were already experimenting with co-creative models of tourism, such as participatory workshops and collaborative art projects, reframing visitors as potential co-authors rather than passive consumers of place.
- Taken together, the research demonstrates that tourism in District VII produces multiple and often conflicting place imaginaries, shaped by tourists, residents, entrepreneurs, and institutions. The district’s tourism milieu emerges not as fixed, but as a contested and negotiated field of symbolic, economic, and emotional struggles.
- The study contributes novel insights by showing that cultural institutions act as epistemic mediators, balancing global tourism pressures with local needs through care, reflexivity, and creative experimentation. However, their transformative potential remains limited without structural reforms and expanded authority.

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** (Kant, 1998): 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.

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5. List of own (or co-authored) publications on the topic

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