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Impacts of Cyprus's Cultural Identity on Tourism

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1. Introduction

The allure of Cyprus is both personal and scholarly for me. After travelling through its sunlit landscapes, exploring ancient ruins surrounded by olive trees, and experiencing the nature of the warm and welcoming Mediterranean hospitality, I've come to admire the island's distinctive fusion of cultures. This personal connection to Cyprus inspired me to research its cultural identity and tourism industry for my thesis.

Cyprus, located at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and Africa, is a melting pot of rich traditions and dynamic modernity, which makes it a compelling subject for examining cultural exchange, sustainability, and economic vitality. Throughout history, the island has witnessed a succession of civilizations, each leaving a lasting impact on its cultural landscape. From the ancient Greeks and Romans to the Venetians and Ottomans, every era has influenced the island's tapestry, as it can be seen in its architecture, cuisine, and local customs.

Today, Cyprus faces the challenge of navigating a complex political division while sustaining a flourishing tourism industry. The southern part of the island, which under the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus, boasts advanced tourism infrastructure and attracts millions of visitors with its mix of luxury resorts, cultural festivals, and archaeological sites. The north, which is under the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus operates in relative isolation but preserves its own distinctive cultural legacy and natural beauty. Tourism plays a vital role in Cyprus's economy, accounting for a considerable portion of its GDP. The industry has transitioned from primarily focusing on traditional "sun-and-sea" holidays to incorporate a wide range of experiences, including cultural, agro-, and eco-tourism. Visitors are becoming more drawn to Cyprus not only for its beaches but also for its abundant cultural heritage, engaging activities, and local traditions. Despite obstacles like seasonality, geopolitical divisions, and environmental sustainability, the islands' wide range of attractions make it a year-round destination.

This thesis aims to examine Cyprus's cultural identity and tourism industry through the lens of sustainability and heritage preservation. The literature review emphasizes the interconnection of tourism's economic influence with cultural exchange, which plays a role in supporting local

communities and shaping national identity. This research intends to place the island's tourism practices into a larger academic discourse, with identifying existing gaps that I seeks to address.

My research methodology involves interviews with tourism professionals from different subfields of tourism, providing valuable insights into the challenges and trends that shape Cyprus's tourism landscape. The objective is to reveal the intricate relationship between culture, heritage, and tourism development, while highlighting the unique position Cyprus occupies within the global tourism market.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the expanding research on sustainable tourism and cultural heritage management. It is my hope that the findings will illuminate the complexities and opportunities inherent in Cyprus's tourism industry, fostering strategies that preserve its vibrant cultural legacy while promoting economic vitality.

2. Literature review

In the literature review part of this paper, I will explore existing research on Cyprus, specifically focusing on its cultural identity, sustainability and heritage preservation practices, and the economic impacts of tourism. This section aims to contextualize my study within the broader scholarly discourse, identifying gaps that my research seeks to address.

2.1 Definitions

Westcott and Anderson (2021), describe tourism as the act of individuals traveling to and staying in places outside their regular environment for leisure, business, or other purposes for up to one year. They highlight the impact of tourism on global mobility and cultural exchanges, which also aligns with Richards's (2018) views on how tourism fosters cultural and economic exchange. Westcott and Anderson (2021) further define cultural tourism as visits to cultural, historical, or heritage sites, that involves engaging with a destination's living culture, including arts, crafts, traditions, and lifestyles. This is consistent with Mousavi et al.'s (2016) interpretation, which covers both tangible and intangible cultural elements, such as architecture, heritage sites, and local customs. According to Sayeh (2022), cultural tourism not only serves educational purposes but also contributes significantly to the economic vitality of destinations by enhancing their attractiveness. In addition, Westcott and Anderson (2021) mention that the pursuit of cultural

tourists can range from incidental to purposeful cultural engagements. Richards (2018) categorizes these tourists based on their level of engagement and motivation, representing a spectrum from casual visitors to purposeful cultural enthusiasts. As described by Westcott and Anderson (2021), purposeful cultural tourists seek immersive cultural experiences to gain deep understanding of a destination's heritage and current way of life. These tourists value structured cultural interactions like guided tours and educational events, which emphasize the historical and cultural relevance of the sites they visit (Westcott and Anderson, 2021). On the other hand, incidental cultural tourists may engage with culture in unexpected ways during their travels. These visitors rather enjoy spontaneous cultural activities, such as attending local festivals or visiting newly discovered cultural venues, which greatly enrich their travel experience (Westcott and Anderson, 2021).

Destination managers and cultural heritage professionals must recognize the varied cultural tourist spectrum in order to develop strategies that cater to each group's specific needs. To effectively cater to both types of tourists, destination managers and cultural heritage professionals need to acknowledge the spectrum of tourists, and by tailoring cultural offerings and marketing strategies destinations can better meet tourist expectations and facilitate deeper cultural interactions (Westcott and Anderson 2021). Catering to both incidental and purposeful tourist' needs can lead to significant and improving cultural offerings to match these tourists' expectations not only improves their experience, but also stimulates local economic development. Effective integration of cultural heritage preservation with modern tourism practices is necessary, in order to create a sustainable and dynamic cultural tourism sector (Sayeh, 2022). Overall, understanding and satisfying the variety of activities and motives that cultural tourists and destinations engage in, can help destinations build a strong cultural tourism industry, increasing both the visitor experience and the cultural and economic vitality of the destinations they visit (Westcott and Anderson, 2021).

2.2 Tourism Statistics

There has been a significant growth in tourism in Cyprus over the years, with a notable rise in the number of visitors, expenditure, and GDP contribution from the sector. According to the Cyprus Statistical Service, the tourist arrivals in Cyprus hit 4.833.939 in 2022, showing 85.8% growth compared to 2021 (Cyprus Statistical Service, 2023.). This growth is credited to the country's advantageous location, rich historical background, and natural beauty, that make it a

sought after spot for travellers. The expenditure by tourists in Cyprus also saw a substantial increase, with the average expenditure per person reaching €761.92 in 2022 (Cyprus Statistical Service, 2023). This is a decrease of 2.5% from 2021, but still signifies a substantial contribution to the country's economy. The highest average expenditure per person was recorded in August, with €885.98, while the lowest was in December with €523.42 (Cyprus Statistical Service, 2023). The GDP from the tourism industry in Cyprus is significant, as revenue from tourism reached €2.439.2 million in 2022, which was an increase of 61.2% compared to 2021 (Cyprus Statistical Service, 2023). The growth trend is expected to continue, with plans of the Deputy Ministry of Tourism to allocate €65.2 million in its 2024 budget, surpassing previous years. Accommodation statistics in Cyprus indicates a major increase in the number of hotels and similar establishments. According to a report from Statista, there has been an increase in the number of hotels and similar accommodation in Cyprus from 2010 to 2022 (Statista, 2021). This growth is expected to continue, with the Deputy Ministry of Tourism focusing on improving the quality of tourism offerings, including the maintenance of public infrastructure, and cleanliness, urban planning, and zoning regulations. The purpose of travel for tourists visiting Cyprus is mainly for holidays, with 80.8% of tourists stating that their trip was for leisure (Press and Information Office, 2023). The remaining 19.2% travelled to visit friends and relatives or traveled for business purposes (Press and Information Office, 2023), indicating that Cyprus is an attractive destination for those seeking a relaxing holiday. Notably, there are seasonality patterns within Cyprus, with July-September marking the peak season (Cyprus Statistical Service, 2023). During this period, the majority of tourists visit the country, and the average expenditure per person reaches its highest point. According to Berjozkina's findings from 2022, small island developing states (SIDS) like Cyprus face a unique set of challenges and opportunities. Among these challenges, the issue of seasonal fluctuations emerge as significant issue, affecting economic stability and sustainability. This repetitive cycle results in economic fluctuations, with peaks in tourist arrivals during the summer leading to a boom in economic activity, followed by a sharp decline in the off-season. This pattern exacerbates issues like unemployment and underutilization of resources, as many employees find themselves without work during the winter months (Berjozkina, 2022). The lowest average expenditure per person is recorded in December, which clearly indicates a decrease in tourist activity during the winter months (Cyprus Statistical Service, 2023). The high influx of tourists during peak months can lead to resource overuse, environmental degradation, and a decline in the

quality of life for local residents. On the other hand, the off-season provides an opportunity for the natural and built environment to recuperate and for infrastructure to be maintained or upgraded, highlighting the complex interplay between tourism and sustainability in Cyprus (Berjokina, 2022). Assessing sustainability indicators has become crucial for tourism in Cyprus, which is why the Deputy Ministry of Tourism has made efforts to improve the quality of the tourism product. (International Trade Administration, 2022). The government aims to expand the range of the tourism product, moving beyond the traditional "sun and sea" focus to include options that can appeal to visitors in the off-peak seasons (Berjokina, 2022).

2.3 Island Identity

Island identity is not simply based on geographical isolation but is also shaped by historical interactions and the strategic geopolitical positioning of an island. In the case of Cyprus, its location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa has made it a pivotal focus of historical conquests and cultural exchanges, which have intricately woven into its identity over centuries (Edquist and Holmén, 2015). The blend of Cypriot cultures with the influences of various occupiers like the Greeks, Ottomans, and British, has created a vibrant cultural mosaic that continues to influence local perceptions and societal norms.

Moreover, the geopolitical tensions, especially the division of the island into the predominantly Greek Cypriot south and the Turkish Cypriot north, have further cemented a strong sense of distinct island identity. These political realities play a crucial role in shaping how island residents perceive themselves not only in relation to each other but also concerning the broader global community (Nunkoo et al., 2010). This political dimension of island identity often complicates the relationship with the concept of nationhood and sovereignty, which is uniquely experienced by island populations. Economically, islands like Cyprus often face particular challenges related to their isolation and limited resources, which can make economic strategies heavily reliant on specific industries such as tourism. Tourism has undoubtedly become a cornerstone of the economy in Cyprus, influencing much of the economic policy and development strategies on the island. Relying heavily on tourism can shape the economic landscape, which also means that it deeply influences the socio-cultural dimensions of island life, impacting everything from employment patterns to local customs and community interactions (Edquist and Holmén, 2015). The development of the tourism industry in Cyprus exemplifies how island economies often

adapt their unique geographic and cultural assets to meet global economic demands, meanwhile shaping a distinctive economic identity that intertwines with cultural identity. Additionally, the natural environment of an island also plays a significant role in shaping the identity of its residents. The physical boundaries of the sea create a natural sense of separation and autonomy that influences local psyche and cultural norms. The Mediterranean Sea not only serves as a barrier in Cyprus but also as a bridge to the neighbouring regions, facilitating cultural and economic exchanges that are essential to the island's integration into regional dynamics (Foley et al., 2023). This dual role of the sea, as both divider and unifier, contributes to a nuanced relationship with both the natural surroundings and the broader geopolitical landscape. Island identity is also influenced by the cultural narratives and traditions that are passed down through generations, which in the case of Cyprus include tales of resilience, survival, and cultural richness. These narratives are often celebrated in local festivals and cultural events that aim to preserve these unique cultural traits, while also serving as attractions within the tourism sector, further blending the cultural and economic strands of island identity (Nunkoo et al., 2010).

The ongoing political challenges in Cyprus, including the unresolved issues of division and efforts of reunification, continue to impact how the local Cypriots perceive their identity. The division of the island has led to the distinct formation of identities on each side of the island, shaped by differing political allegiances, economic conditions, and social dynamics. These identities are continuously evolving in response to political negotiations and shifts in global political perceptions toward the island (Edquist and Holmén, 2015). To truly grasp the meaning of island identity in Cyprus requires a consideration of a wide array of factors, including historical backgrounds, economic approaches, political realities, and geographical characteristics - all contributing to a nuanced and ever changing sense of self among island residents.

2.4 The Importance of Cultural Heritage Preservation

Cultural heritage preservation is crucial for maintaining the continuity and integrity of a society's identity, history, and traditions. It involves the protection and restoration of artifacts, structures, and practices that have historical, cultural, or aesthetic value. This conservation is vital not only for academic and historical purposes, but also for its ability to foster community pride, educate future generations, and even boost economic development through tourism. Yeniasır and

Gökbulut highlight the importance of digitalizing cultural heritage in Northern Cyprus as a strategy to sustain cultural tourism and economic progress (Yeniasır and Gökbulut, 2022).

Digital heritage initiatives enable remote access to the exploration of cultural assets, which can broaden the scope of educational tourism related activities, while potentially increasing the visibility of lesser-known sites and artifacts. The importance of cultural heritage preservation extends beyond mere conservation. Abos (2023) emphasizes the role of educational tourism in cultural heritage preservation, suggesting that it can act as a connection between local history and global audiences (Abos, 2023). By involving tourists and locals in educational initiatives centered around heritage sites, a deeper comprehension and appreciation of cultural significance are can be fostered, which enhances the support for preservation efforts. Further insights by Muluemebet et al. discuss how cultural heritage preservation can be integral to social cohesion and identity (Muluemebet, Getachew and Mulugeta, 2022). When communities actively engage in maintaining and restoring their heritage, it strengthens communal ties and ensures that cultural practices are passed down through generations. In the context of Cyprus, Nilson and Thorell (2018) explore how sustainable approaches in cultural heritage can bring benefits not just the present, but also for upcoming generations. They emphasize the need to strike a balance required between utilizing cultural heritage for economic benefits, such as tourism, and conserving these resources to ensure their long term sustainability. This dual approach ensures that while cultural heritage contributes to the economy, it is still safeguarded from overexploitation. These perspectives collectively underscore the significance of cultural heritage preservation. It goes beyond maintaining the past for historical appreciation, because it is also about leveraging this heritage for educational purposes, community bonding, and sustainable economic development. With Cyprus's diverse mix of cultures and histories, the strategic use of cultural heritage can pave the way for a sustainable future that honora and preserves its historical narratives.

2.5 Economic Impacts of Tourism

Tourism is a vital economic pillar that plays a crucial role in shaping Cyprus's economic landscape, influencing its growth through various direct and indirect impacts across multiple sectors. It serves as a primary source of foreign exchange earnings, while also providing substantial contributions to the national GDP. Additionally, tourism creates various job opportunities, from hospitality roles to managerial positions, therefore significantly bolstering employment. Ivanov

and Webster (2007) highlight how these direct financial inputs are complemented by infrastructure developments that enhance transportation networks like roads, airports, and ports. Such improvements benefit not only tourists but also increase the overall economic efficiency, aiding other sectors and the local community as well (Ivanov and Webster, 2007). Apart from the major economic contributions, tourism stimulates local industries including agriculture, crafts, and entertainment, through tourists' expenditures. This support for local businesses and services creates a multiplier effect, spreading economic benefits widely within the community. Not to mention, the sector also promotes human capital development through various training and skill enhancement opportunities, particularly in service-oriented fields, while contributing to broader economic resilience (Ivanov and Webster, 2007).

As explained by Hadjidakou et al. (2013), the environmental implications of tourism are also significant, they also emphasize the need for sustainable practices to mitigate the impacts of resource-intensive tourist activities. Their research suggests a balanced approach to tourism development that considers environmental stewardship alongside economic benefits, and the long-term viability of Cyprus's natural assets which are essential for tourism (Hadjidakou et al., 2013). Apart from its economic and environmental implications, tourism plays a critical role in the geopolitical dynamics of North Cyprus, especially considering its relationship with Turkey. Enhancements in marketing, transportation, and investments linked to tourism underscore its broader economic and political significance. Altinay et al. (2002) detail how these enhancements have profound effects beyond economic impact, shaping regional stability and growth prospects. However, despite these positive impacts, Cyprus's tourism sector faces challenges related to economic dependency. This dependency can make the island more sensitive to economic shocks, which can disproportionately impact it due to its heavy reliance on tourism. Sharpley (2009) elaborates on how this economic dependency can create vulnerabilities that could induce economic instability during downturns in global tourism demand (Sharpley, 2009). Figini and Patuelli (2021) delve into the competitive dynamics within the tourism industry, noting that innovation and diversification in tourist offerings are critical for maintaining and enhancing the sector's competitiveness. They argue that investing in unique tourism experiences can provide a sustainable path for development, reducing dependency on traditional mass tourism markets and adapting more effectively to global tourism trends (Figini and Patuelli, 2021). Moreover, incorporating sustainable tourism practices is key for minimizing environmental impacts and protecting the

natural and cultural assets that attract tourists. This integration helps maintain the sector's viability and its significant economic contributions. As the tourism industry evolves, there is an growing demand for strategic planning and diversified policies that amplify economic impacts while also promoting sustainable practices and reduce dependency risks.

By adopting these strategic approaches, Cyprus can ensure that tourism continues to be a robust driver of economic development while fostering an environment that supports sustainable growth and stability. These strategies are essential for leveraging tourism's benefits effectively, recognizing both its potential and the associated risks to craft a resilient and diverse economic future for Cyprus.

2.6 Sustainable Tourism Practices

Sustainable tourism in Cyprus is an evolving topic that involves multiple aspects, such as economic, social, and environmental. It aims to foster a tourism model that is both resilient and beneficial to all stakeholders involved. Cyprus's economy heavily relies on tourism, which contributes significantly to its GDP, yet this dependence highlights the need for a sustainable approach even more, to address the challenges of seasonal fluctuations, resource management, and environmental preservation. One of the most pressing issues in Cypriot tourism is the seasonality of visitor flows, primarily concentrated in the coastal areas during summer months. This pattern puts a pressure on local infrastructure and services and results in underutilization during off-peak seasons (Berjozkina and Garanti, 2022). In order to address this challenge, various initiatives are being made to diversify tourism offerings and promote year-round tourism. This includes the expanding into cultural, health, sports, and rural tourism, which not only helps in spreading tourism revenues throughout the year but also aids in the decentralization of tourist activities from the coastal to the inland regions (Katemliadis et al., 2021). The Cyprus Sustainable Tourism Initiative (CSTI) aims to steer the island towards higher sustainability standards, by fostering collaborations between businesses, local communities, and governmental bodies across the island.

Efforts are currently directed towards improving the efficiency of resources, reducing the environmental footprint of tourism activities, and ensuring that the benefits of tourism are equitably shared among all Cypriots (Katemliadis et al., 2021). In North Cyprus, specific emphasis is placed on the development and implementation of sustainable tourism indicators (STIs) to monitor the effectiveness of sustainable practices. These indicators are crucial for ensuring that the tourism

sector contributes positively to the economic and social well being of the community while minimizing its environmental impacts (Ozturen and Ozgit, 2022). The thorough use of STIs supports informed policymaking and strategic planning which is essential for the long-term sustainability of the island's tourism sector (Ozturen and Ozgit, 2022). Furthermore, the engagement of local and international stakeholders in sustainable tourism is critical, because involving local communities in tourism planning and development helps to preserve and showcase local culture and heritage, and ensures that tourism developments meet the needs and expectations of the residents. International stakeholders, such as tourists and foreign investors, are also integral as they bring different perspectives, expectations, and expertise, which can contribute to the richness and diversity of the tourism experience offered in Cyprus (Garanti and Berjozkina, 2021).

Incorporating cutting edge technologies into tourism operations, such as data analytics and sustainable resource management systems plays a role in improving efficiency and guest satisfaction. Additionally, technology facilitates the real-time monitoring of environmental conditions and tourist behaviors, while also enabling timely adjustments to preserve natural resources and improve the tourism experience (Ozturen and Ozgit, 2022). Atun et al. (2018), emphasize the importance of architectural sustainability in tourism infrastructure, suggesting that sustainable building practices are crucial for reducing the ecological footprint of tourism facilities. Embracing green building standards and energy-efficient designs can help to minimize the environmental impact and enhance the aesthetic and functional quality of tourism developments, making them more attractive to eco-conscious travelers (Atun et al., 2018). Tackling the challenges of sustainable tourism in Cyprus requires an approach that considers environmental issues as well as socio-economic factors. It involves recognizing the nuanced impacts of tourism on local communities and ecosystems and developing strategies that mitigate negative outcomes while amplifying the benefits. This balanced approach ensures that tourism development is not only economically rewarding but also socially inclusive and environmentally responsible (Atun et al., 2018). Educational initiatives aimed at raising awareness about the principles of sustainable tourism among stakeholders—ranging from policymakers and business owners to local community members and tourists—are crucial. These programs help in building a knowledgeable community that advocates for sustainable practices in tourism. Moreover, it is imperative to implement policies that incentivize sustainable investments and enforce regulatory compliance to cultivate a thriving sustainable tourism sector (Atun et al., 2018). As Cyprus continues to develop its tourism sector,

the integration of sustainability principles into every aspect of tourism development and management remains vital. This includes embracing environmental conservation practices and equitable economic distribution. Through these concerted efforts, Cyprus can establish a sustainable tourism framework that supports its development goals and ensures the long-term viability of its tourism industry.

Sustainable tourism in Cyprus effectively merges technology and education to preserve cultural heritage while enhancing tourism. Agapiou et al. (2015) emphasize the importance of remote sensing technologies and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in keeping an eye on and safeguarding Cyprus's archaeological treasures. This technology helps authorities effectively identify and mitigate environmental and human threats to these sites, ensuring that they remain intact and accessible for future generations (Agapiou et al., 2015). Building upon this notion, Catapoti et al. (2020) explore how Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are integrated into heritage management. They suggest the need to boost digital literacy among heritage professionals to effectively use advanced digital tools for conservation purposes. The integration of ICT can support preservation efforts, while also making cultural heritage more accessible to tourists, fostering sustainable tourism practices that honor and maintain historical integrity (Catapoti et al., 2020). Themistocleous (2012) highlights the importance of maintaining the aesthetic and structural integrity of heritage sites, particularly focusing on how atmospheric pollution impacts these sites in Cyprus. He uses satellite remote sensing to develop a methodological framework for identifying and assessing risk areas around heritage sites, enabling precise conservation efforts. This technology is essential for protecting these sites from pollution induced harm while keeping them attractive and informative for tourists (Themistocleous, 2012). Zort (2023) emphasizes the need of educational initiatives in promoting sustainable tourism. He recommends educating visitors about the cultural and historical importance of heritage sites, which can encourage more respectful and sustainable behaviors. By understanding and appreciating these sites, tourists can participate more actively in their preservation and respect the cultural stories they tell, which is also crucial for sustainable tourism and heritage conservation (Zort, 2023). Şevketoğlu (2015) extends this discussion to the underwater cultural heritage of Cyprus, pointing out the unique preservation challenges these environments pose. The research promotes specialized, sustainable, and non-intrusive conservation strategies. These strategies protect these underwater sites and also make them appealing to niche tourism markets, thereby supporting

sustainable tourism that boosts the economy without sacrificing cultural preservation (Şevketoğlu, 2015).

The fusion of technology and education in sustainable tourism practices is essential to effectively manage and conserve cultural heritage in Cyprus. By utilizing advanced technologies like GIS and remote sensing, combined with programs that involve locals and tourists, Cyprus can ensure the ongoing viability of its cultural heritage. This comprehensive approach helps balance preservation needs with the goals of accessibility and engagement (Agapiou et al., 2015; Catapoti et al., 2020; Themistocleous, 2012; Zort, 2023; Şevketoğlu, 2015). Such efforts are crucial for preserving the historical and cultural narratives of Cyprus, setting a global standard for sustainable tourism practices.

2.7 Tourism Branches

Cyprus has been famous for with its picturesque beaches and clear waters, attracting tourists primarily for its sun-and-sea offerings. However, the island is making significant efforts to diversify its tourism sectors in order to to enhance its appeal and extend the tourist season. Apart from the well-established sector of cultural tourism, Cyprus is actively expanding into other tourism branches such as wine tourism, gastro tourism, ecotourism, agrotourism, and pescatourism. These initiatives are crucial in broadening the island's tourism appeal to tourists, beyond its rich historical and cultural offerings, diversifying tourist experiences, and promoting sustainable practices that benefit both the local economy and the environment.

Wine Tourism is capitalizing on Cyprus's rich enological history and traditions. With an ancient viticulture heritage and renowned for its native grape varieties, Cyprus is on track to become a top wine tourism destination. Regions such as Limassol, renowned for the legendary "Commandaria" wine, are central in this initiative. The development of themed wine routes, combined with local gastronomy provides a holistic experience that is culturally enriching and palate pleasing (Liasidou, 2017). Gastro Tourism highlights the island's culinary diversity with the aim of positioning Cyprus as a premiere culinary destination. Through initiatives like "Cyprus Breakfast" and "Taste Cyprus," the island promotes its unique cuisine while integrating various tourism services. This creates a diverse network that includes local eateries, food producers, and accommodations, to create a gastro-tourism cluster aimed at delivering unforgettable culinary experiences and promoting sustainable tourism development (Garanti and Stylianou, 2022).

Ecotourism in Cyprus focuses on the preservation of its unique natural landscapes while providing tourists with educational and engaging experiences. This branch of tourism plays a vital role in the sustainable management of natural resources and promotes environmental awareness, which is especially important in areas like the Akamas Peninsula, known for their ecological significance and natural beauty (Yorganci and Emin, 2022). Agrotourism connects visitors with Cyprus's agricultural traditions, by offering a glimpse into the rural Cypriot lifestyle. This sector not only helps preserve rural landscapes and traditions, but also provides a stable income for local communities, therefore preventing rural depopulation. It's a unique opportunity for tourists to engage in authentic rural activities and understand traditional farming practices (Piasecki, 2016).

Pescatourism blends Cyprus's rich fishing traditions with its tourism offerings, by allowing tourists to partake in fishing activities alongside local fishermen. This integration offers an authentic insight into the marine life and fishing culture of the island, educating tourists on sustainable fishing practices to preserve the marine ecosystem (Piasecki, 2016). Cultural Tourism, already a well-developed sector, continues to be a major draw for the island.

Efforts like "Heartland of Legends" project aim to showcase Cyprus's rich traditions and cultural treasures. These endeavors are crucial in repositioning Cyprus as a culturally rich destination, with a wide range of activities that span from participating in local festivals to exploring historical sites. The array of cultural tourism activities enrich the tourist experience while also supporting the island's rebranding as a year-round destination (Garanti, 2022). Together, these various tourism sectors are reshaping Cyprus's tourism scene, offering richer and more diverse visitor experiences. By extending the tourism season and promoting a sustainable economic model, these initiatives ensure that the benefits of tourism are well-distributed among local communities. The collaborative efforts involving government entities, the private sector, and local communities are essential for achieving these objectives, and establishing a sustainable and thriving tourism economy in Cyprus.

2.8 Cultural Identity of Cyprus

The cultural identity in Cyprus is deeply influenced by its tumultuous history and strategic location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa. This creates a complex and divided narrative, intricately intertwined with its tourism industry. This identity reflects the traditions, languages, and religious beliefs of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, each community

promoting their unique heritage to visitors while reinforcing their separate national identities (Leonard, 2012). The longstanding issue of the „Cyprus problem” is deeply rooted in the island's history, driven by nationalistic fervor from both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots and compounded by intervention from external powers such as Greece and Turkey. This conflict escalated in 1974 following a coup d'état instigated by Greece leading to Turkey's intervention in the region of the island. This resulted in physical and psychological division: the south remaining the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus, while the north declared independence as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, recognized only by Turkey (Constantinou, 2007). This division significantly influences the tourism sector, where it shapes narratives and influences how cultural identity is marketed.

Tourism in Cyprus does more than generate revenue; it serves as a platform for expressing cultural identity. In the south, Greek Cypriots highlight their Hellenic roots, ancient ruins, and Orthodox Christianity, creating a connection with the wider Hellenic world and appealing to tourists interested in classical history and Mediterranean culture. On the other hand, Turkish Cypriots in the north emphasize their Islamic heritage and connection to the Anatolian mainland, offering a mix of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean experiences (Stefanidis et al., 2021). Media portrayal in each community significantly impacts how these identities are perceived by tourists and the global community. For instance Turkish Cypriot media, plays a pivotal role in shaping the perception of Turkish Cypriot identity by highlighting distinct cultural markers such as language, religion, and customs that align yet also subtly distinguish them from mainland Turks (Şahin, 2011). This not only attracts tourists looking for a unique cultural experience but also solidifies a sense of identity among the locals. The island's division has created a unique form of tourism—visiting the "Green Line," which is the United Nations buffer zone that separates the north and south. This form of dark tourism provides visitors with insights into the island's political conflicts, through tours that explain the complex history behind the visible barriers and abandoned areas. Such tourism initiatives educate visitors on the Cyprus problem and immerse them in the island's ongoing narrative of division and struggle for reconciliation (Constantinou, 2007).

Despite the separation, both communities share numerous cultural elements, such as culinary traditions, certain folk music, and family values, which could be featured more often in tourism initiatives. These commonalities represent an underutilized layer of Cyprus's tourism industry.

Emphasizing these shared aspects could not only diversify the tourist experience but also help bridge the ethnic divide, fostering a sense of shared Cypriot identity (Leonard, 2012). External influences further complicate the cultural identity portrayed to tourists. The Greek influence in the south and Turkish influence in the north affect everything from the educational systems to religious institutions, deeply impacting how each community's identity is developed and portrayed. This external involvement also shapes tourist expectations, as visitors often come with preconceived notions about the cultural and political landscape of the island, influenced by the broader geopolitical narratives (Sirin, 2012). The tourism industry reflects Cyprus's divided cultural identity and also actively participates in its construction. Each side uses tourism to affirm its sovereignty and right to self-determination, while also capitalizing on the economic benefits that come with attracting international visitors. At this point, tourists are not merely passive observers but are drawn into this narrative, experiencing the complexities of Cypriot cultural identity firsthand.

Culturally, the divide is prominently marked by distinct ethnic and linguistic identities. The south is predominantly Greek, influenced heavily by the traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church, while the north reflects Turkish-Islamic heritage. These cultural distinctions manifest in various ways, from language and religious practices to culinary traditions and music. Sahin (2011) emphasizes how these cultural elements define social life and communal identity on either side of the buffer zone. The education systems in both the north and south amplify these differences. According to Dunér (1999), schools in both regions teach a version of history that fosters a sense of distinct nationalism, perpetuating a divide that reaches into the future by molding the historical consciousness of the youth.

Economically, the two parts of Cyprus diverge significantly. The Republic of Cyprus benefits from its integration with the European Union, which includes financial aid and access to expansive markets, adopting the Euro and aligning closely with EU policies and economies (Isik, 2013). In contrast, Northern Cyprus depends largely on Turkey for economic support and has limited recognition internationally, which restricts its economic development and access to global markets (Isik, 2013). Tourism, a major economic driver for the island, also highlights these disparities. The south attracts more international tourists thanks to its developed infrastructure and

recognized status, while the north primarily draws Turkish visitors intrigued by its political isolation (Oktay, 2005).

The geopolitical landscape of Cyprus is perhaps where the division is most evident. The Republic of Cyprus enjoys full international recognition and membership in the European Union, giving it considerable leverage on the international stage (Baruh and Popescu, 2008). On the other hand, Northern Cyprus is recognized only by Turkey, resulting in diplomatic and trade isolation that severely impacts its foreign relations and international standing (Baruh and Popescu, 2008). This isolation is exacerbated by the presence of Turkish military forces in the north, aligning Northern Cyprus's foreign policy closely with that of Turkey. This alignment starkly contrasts with the Republic of Cyprus's broader international relationships and active participation in global and regional organizations (Eryiğit, 2018). Security concerns and negotiations over the island's status further illuminate the deep-seated geopolitical differences. The north's security is heavily influenced by Turkish military presence, which plays a critical role in its external and internal policies. Attempts to negotiate a settlement for the island's future are continuously undermined by deep-rooted mistrust and historical grievances that cloud inter-communal relations. Terkourafi (2007) points out that these negotiations frequently stall due to the incompatible visions held by each side for the island's future, influenced by their distinct geopolitical orientations and alliances (Terkourafi, 2007).

Amidst these divisions, the economic, cultural, and political landscapes of both parts of Cyprus continue to evolve, shaped by their unique circumstances and challenges. The south, with its EU membership, navigates a path of development and integration into the European mainstream, which offers economic advantages and political stability (Isik, 2013). Meanwhile, the north, underpinned by its reliance on Turkey and limited international recognition, faces significant hurdles in development and international diplomacy. This intricate web of division and dependency is further complicated by the ongoing negotiations and security concerns, painting a complex picture of an island where history and modernity collide. The continuous efforts to bridge these divisions through negotiations have often been hindered by the underlying disparities in cultural identity, economic capacity, and geopolitical alignment. Each community's established positions and the international community's varied interests in Cyprus make the prospect of reconciliation challenging (Terkourafi, 2007).

3. Research Methodology

This chapter delves into the qualitative research methodology, with a specific focus on interviews as my primary method of data collection. The section aims to provide a thorough understanding of how qualitative methods, particularly interviews, can be effectively utilized in research to gather deep, meaningful insights.

3.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a methodological approach commonly used in the social sciences to explore and understand people's beliefs, behaviors, interactions, experiences, and emotions. This type of research is often descriptive in nature and focuses on the "quality" of phenomena, rather than quantifying elements through numerical data as in quantitative research (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Qualitative research is essential for capturing the complexities of professional practices and interactions within specific fields. This methodology emphasizes thoroughness by relying on meanings, concepts, descriptions, and personal narratives (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). Among various qualitative methods, in-depth interviews are particularly valuable since they provide a deep understanding of individuals' perspectives and experiences.

The aim with conducting qualitative research through in-depth interviews in this study was prompted by the need to gather firsthand insights from tourism professionals. Choosing this approach allowed me to explore the perspectives and experiences of these professionals in detail, which is something quantitative methods may not capture adequately. In-depth interviews offer a platform for participants to freely express their thoughts and feelings, therefore providing deeper insights into the dynamics of the tourism industry (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

3.2 Research Method

The primary research method used in this study was semi-structured interviews to delve into the experiences of participants in the tourism industry in Cyprus. This approach utilizes a flexible set of open-ended questions that enable an in-depth exploration of complex issues. The open-ended nature of the questions is crucial as it allows participants to express their thoughts and emotions

freely, that leads to a a more profound comprehension of the underlying dynamics within the tourism sector.

Such a format is particularly effective in examining the unique cultural identity of Cyprus, as outlined in Research Question 1 (RQ1): "How does Cyprus's cultural identity differentiate it from other destinations and what role does its uniqueness play in attracting visitors?" By encouraging detailed narratives, the interviews aim to uncover how Cyprus's distinct culture, traditions, and historical legacy contribute to its appeal as a travel destination.

The interviews were conducted online from April 12 to May 1, that made participation from a geographically diverse group possible and enhanced the accessibility of the research. Each session lasted between 30 minutes to one hour - a duration that allowed thorough discussion without overwhelming the participants. This timeframe proved sufficient to also address Research Question 2 (RQ2): "How is Cyprus's cultural heritage preserved within the tourism industry and what strategies ensure its sustainability amidst changing tourist demands?" Participants were asked to discuss the strategies employed by local tourism operators to maintain and showcase cultural heritage, ensuring its preservation while meeting the evolving preferences of tourists.

All interviews were audio-recorded with consent so that no significant details would be overlooked, which also enabled multiple reviews for a comprehensive analysis. Apart from their introduction, the same set of 19 questions were asked from them. The robustness of the data collection was essential for addressing Research Question 3 (RQ3): "What are the cultural and economic disparities between the south and north sides and how do these differences impact tourism development?" This question was asked to explore the complex socio-economic and cultural divisions between the Greek Cypriot south and the Turkish Cypriot north, seeking to understand how these disparities influence the overall tourism strategy and development in the region.

The literature review serves as a foundational pillar, grounding the analysis in established theories, frameworks, and empirical studies relevant to the field of tourism. The analysis is built on the synthesis of interview data and literature review, which offeris valuable insights into the world of Cyprus's tourism industry. This methodological approach was vital to gather the varied perspectives of tourism professionals, since it revealed valuable insights about the challenges and

trends shaping the industry. By combining the theoretical and practical aspects, the study addresses the unique position of Cyprus in the global tourism landscape.

3.3 Target Group

The target group for this study consisted of tourism professionals from Cyprus, Latvia and Hungary as a strategic choice to understand the sector's dynamics within a specific cultural and economic context. The participants were chosen to represent a wider spectrum of roles within the tourism industry, aiming to capture a comprehensive view of the sector's complex nature.

To achieve this diversity, the research focused on individuals from various subfields of tourism. Participants included a tourism officer from the Deputy Ministry of Cyprus, whose insights were expected to explain national tourism policies and their impact on the local economy and culture. Additionally, an aquatic tourism professional was selected to shed light on this niche area, which is vital for an island nation where water-based activities play a significant role in attracting tourists. The study also involved an employee from hotel industry who provided a perspective from the frontline of hospitality and guest interactions, which are crucial for the overall tourist experience. Finally, an assistant professor specializing in tourism studies was included to offer an academic viewpoint and deeper analysis of trends and educational impacts on the industry.

By engaging with professionals across these diverse roles, the research aimed to grasp a wide array of perspectives by understanding of how different sectors within the tourism industry interact and contribute to the broader tourism landscape in Cyprus. This targeted approach allowed the exploration of the challenges and opportunities within the industry which is essential for developing strategies that enhance tourism experiences and economic benefits in the region.

4. Presentation of Findings

This section of this thesis is vital for understanding the practical implications of theoretical concepts explored in the broader study, and it compiles firsthand experiences and insights of four industry professionals. The interviews were carefully crafted to uncover specific aspects of their professional engagements and personal experiences that highlight the dynamic interplay between tourism development and cultural heritage.

This section will present each interviewee's detailed responses to three series of questions about their professional roles, experiences, and perceptions of the tourism sector. The discussions also address views on sustainability, cultural integration, and the economic impact of tourism on the local community. By examining these elements, the interviews enrich the thesis with real-world examples and expert opinions, while offering a grounded perspective that supports the analytical components of the study.

4.1 Introduction of Participants

This thesis benefits from the contributions of four distinguished professionals, each bringing unique insights and expertise from their roles within the tourism and hospitality industry. Their diverse backgrounds and experiences are central to exploring the nuances of this study's themes.

Participant 1

Maria Sokratous, a 42-year-old Cypriot, serves as a tourism officer at the Deputy Ministry of Tourism in Cyprus, a position she has held since 2007. In her role, Maria focuses on the exhibition sector and cultural tourism, bringing a strategic perspective to the table. Her academic credentials include a bachelor's degree in marketing, master's degrees in European Studies and Human Resource Management and Development, and a PhD in Management. Although she lacks a formal education in tourism, her extensive background in management enriches her contributions to the tourism sector with a robust analytical framework.

Participant 2

At 73 years old, Glafkos Kariolou offers a wealth of experience in nautical tourism. A native Cypriot from Kyrenia, he defines himself not as a refugee from the Turkish side but rather as one impacted by regional conflicts. Glafkos started his career in aquatic tourism in 1976 and has since retired, though he continues to engage in related projects. His deep understanding of the historical and socio-political context of Cyprus's tourism industry provides invaluable insights into the challenges and transformations within the sector.

Participant 3

Zanete Garanti is an assistant professor at City Unity College, Nicosia, and hails from Latvia. Since relocating to Cyprus in 2009, she has integrated her extensive knowledge and international

experience in tourism and hospitality management into both her teaching and research activities. Zanete's academic journey is supplemented by her practical experiences across Europe, making her a valuable asset in bridging theoretical knowledge with real-world applications.

Participant 4

Alexandra Bodnar, a 40-year-old professional from Hungary, is deeply involved in the day-to-day operations at a resort hotel near Paphos, where she manages the Front Desk and Reservations. She is native in Greek language since she comes from generations of Greek ancestors. Alexandra holds a bachelor's degree in Tourism and Hospitality and has a rich background in hotel management across various European countries. Her expertise in guest relations and front desk operations highlights the importance of customer service in enhancing the competitiveness and appeal of Cyprus as a tourist destination.

The perspectives and narratives of Maria, Glafkos, Zanete, and Alexandra form a foundational element of this thesis, providing a practical context to the academic exploration of tourism and hospitality dynamics.

4.2 The Interviews

Set 1: Identity and Uniqueness

This set was chosen to capture how locals perceive the island's cultural landscape and how this influences tourism. By exploring what each participant personally appreciates about Cyprus's culture, we can uncover the roots of local pride and understand how those values translate to tourism marketing strategies. Understanding what makes Cyprus attractive provides a foundational view of the island's unique selling points. The comparison between the Turkish and Greek sides reflects a need to understand both perspectives, considering Cyprus's divided nature. The question about Cypriot identity is crucial due to the historical division between the North and South. By exploring whether a sense of unity exists, we can grasp how this fractured identity shapes perceptions and tourism experiences. Identifying tourist motivations and the evolution of tourism provides insight into market trends and how tourist interests have shifted over time. These trends are essential for adapting tourism strategies to evolving demands.

- What Do You Personally Like About Cyprus from A Cultural Perspective?

Cyprus is well-known for its historical richness and scenic beauty, and it holds diverse cultural narratives shaped by its complex history. The perspectives of the four participants shed light on what makes the island unique and how its identity is perceived.

Participant 1 emphasizes the deep-rooted historical treasures scattered across Cyprus, highlighting the UNESCO-protected areas like Paphos as key attractions. She believes that "Cyprus is a very small island, but we do have a lot of history, archaeological sites that are dated like almost 12,000 years." She points out that this abundance of ancient sites and historical layers is remarkable, providing an engaging context for travelers. Participant 2 discusses Cyprus's geographical diversity, describing how visitors can easily travel from the mountains to the coast in a short span. He illustrates this by saying, "You can ski at Troodos Mountain and within 20 minutes, go down to the coast and dive." He sees this accessibility as a unique feature that distinguishes Cyprus from other tourist destinations. The ability to enjoy vastly different environments so close to each other adds to its allure. Participant 3 appreciates the cultural richness found in every village and region of Cyprus, which she states is reflected in the food, family traditions, and historical narratives. She emphasizes, "Every place, every village, every little thing has some kind of a history," underlining how these layers of culture contribute to Cyprus's unique identity. For her, these distinctive elements provide an authentic and immersive experience for visitors. Participant 4 works in hospitality near Paphos and witnesses firsthand how integrating luxury amenities with cultural exploration can enhance tourist satisfaction. She emphasizes that her resort aims to ensure that guests "not only enjoy their stay but also immerse themselves in the cultural and historical richness that Paphos has to offer." This perspective aligns with the overall goal of providing tourists with meaningful engagement beyond just relaxation. These diverse perspectives on Cyprus's unique identity illustrate a shared appreciation for its historical wealth, natural landscapes, and culinary delights. They reveal how each participant perceives the island's culture as deeply rooted, diverse, and accessible.

- Why Do You Think Cyprus Is an Attractive Tourist Destination? What Are the Selling Points on The North/South Side That You Often Highlight?

Cyprus's attractiveness lies in its natural beauty, historical sites, and unique cultural experiences. Participant 1 recognizes the island's sun and sea as primary draws but highlights how

cultural tourism is being increasingly promoted through sports, wine tourism, and nature trails. "We have like 3000 and 40 days of sunshine throughout the year," she says, noting the excellent weather and clean beaches as strong selling points. Participant 3 points out lesser-known attractions like the casino industry in Northern Cyprus, which is a significant draw due to regional gambling restrictions. "In the north, the casinos are a big draw because they're legal here, unlike in many nearby countries," she says, noting how casinos attract a specific demographic not available elsewhere. Participant 2 elaborates on how the South has been diversifying its tourism beyond the traditional sun-and-sea model. "The South has been actively promoting cultural tourism, agro-tourism, and integrating local experiences into the tourism packages, which broadens the appeal," he notes. This diversification enriches the visitor experience by offering more authentic engagement with local culture. Participant 4 supports these sentiments by recognizing how the integration of luxury amenities with cultural immersion provides a fuller experience for tourists. "At the resort, we ensure that our guests not only enjoy their stay but also immerse themselves in the cultural and historical richness that Paphos has to offer," she states, confirming the complementary nature of luxury travel and cultural tourism.

These perspectives present a comprehensive view of Cyprus's attractions, demonstrating how different elements contribute to its appeal. The natural beauty, cultural diversity, historical treasures, and niche attractions like casinos all cater to a broad spectrum of interests, making Cyprus a highly versatile destination.

- What Do You Think the Cypriot Identity Entails? Do You Think There's a Sense of A United Identity?

Exploring Cypriot identity reveals a complex web of historical unity disrupted by political divides. Despite these divisions, some participants feel a shared cultural bond.

Participant 1 believes the shared Cypriot identity is rooted in its historical unity but acknowledges the challenges brought by the island's political divide. She observes that the Greek and Turkish Cypriot cultures are remarkably similar in attitudes, behavior, and beliefs. The division "is a shame because there are no distinct cultural differences." Participant 2 reinforces this sentiment, emphasizing that Turkish and Greek Cypriots historically lived together harmoniously.

"There is very little difference in culture between what we call a Turkish Cypriot and a Greek Cypriot," he notes. Both communities share a similar respect for education and women, traits that differ significantly from neighboring regions. Participant 3 offers an external perspective, stating that "despite the division, there's a strong sense of community and shared cultural values across the island, which can be felt in festivals and local gatherings." Her observation aligns with the participants who are native to the region, underscoring that the division hasn't wholly eroded the sense of shared identity. Participant 4, directly involved in tourism, offers a unique view by pointing out that tourists often don't perceive the island's political division. They "experience Cyprus as one island with a rich culture that pulls from both Greek and Turkish influences, which suggests a kind of unity in diversity." This tourist perception is essential in fostering understanding and reinforcing a unified identity.

Together, these perspectives highlight how shared cultural heritage remains resilient despite political complexities. The island's history, traditions, and festivals reveal a collective identity that can transcend its geographical and political divides.

- What Are the Most Common Tourist Motivations in Your Experience, And Which Are The Most Common Source Markets?

Tourist motivations in Cyprus are as varied as the island's cultural and natural offerings. Participant 1 emphasizes the shift towards a more active and culturally engaged tourist demographic. Many visitors come for activities like sports, hiking, wine tasting, and nature exploration. "We also have snow during winter, so you can go skiing," she adds, reinforcing the island's diversity. Participant 2 provides a perspective on the different markets and motivations driving tourism. "Many visitors come specifically for unique experiences like the Troodos Mountain or the diving spots that are famous here," he notes. His extensive experience in nautical tourism reveals the significant role of sports and adventure activities in attracting visitors. Participant 3 elaborates on the various source markets, observing, "We see a lot of tourists from Europe, especially the UK, Germany, and Russia, who are drawn not only to the weather but also to the cultural and historical tours we offer." Her insights into the demographics show how diversified Cyprus's appeal is. Participant 4 points out that luxury resorts continue to attract families and older tourists looking for comprehensive experiences. "We cater to a range of guests seeking

relaxation and cultural immersion, often helping them discover lesser-known attractions around Paphos," she says. This mix of tourist motivations reflects how modern travelers seek a balance between leisure and cultural activities.

These varied motivations emphasize how Cyprus's multifaceted appeal attracts a wide range of tourists from diverse backgrounds. Whether they are drawn by sports, culture, or luxury experiences, the island caters to their interests effectively.

- Can You Share Any Insights into How Tourism Has Evolved Over The Years And Whether You Noticed Any Shifts In Tourists' Interests/Preferences?

Tourism in Cyprus has evolved significantly over the years, reflecting broader global trends toward sustainable and immersive experiences. Participant 2 recalls the earlier days when tourism was primarily about relaxation and less about cultural engagement. "It used to be mostly about sun and sea, but now tourists want to interact with the local community, learn about our culture," he notes. Participant 1 acknowledges similar shifts in preferences, emphasizing the growth of niche tourism like sports and hiking. "People now want to be engaged in activities, taste local gastronomy, and meet local people," she states. This shift aligns with the global rise of experience-driven tourism, where authenticity and sustainability are increasingly valued. Participant 3 notes how the South has been actively diversifying its tourism industry in response to changing trends. "The South has been actively promoting cultural tourism, agro-tourism, and integrating local experiences into the tourism packages," she says, underscoring how these strategies attract tourists who seek authenticity. Participant 4 elaborates on the hospitality industry's role in this evolution, stating that over the years, "we've shifted towards providing more eco-friendly and culturally rich experiences, which align with global sustainable tourism goals and cater to the growing demand for meaningful travel." She emphasizes that catering to meaningful travel enhances tourist satisfaction and retention.

These insights demonstrate how tourism in Cyprus has matured to reflect global changes in travel preferences. The island has adapted by offering diverse experiences that incorporate sustainable practices, authentic engagement, and cultural depth.

Set 2: Cultural Heritage and Sustainability

This set explores the role of cultural heritage in shaping the tourism narrative and how sustainability is integrated into preserving this identity. Understanding how participants define a cultural tourist establishes a baseline for interpreting cultural engagement. Lesser-known sites and traditions can be overshadowed by more prominent attractions. By highlighting these hidden gems, the set aims to showcase the diverse aspects of Cypriot heritage. The importance of cultural heritage is vital because it emphasizes whether the island's rich history resonates with visitors. This understanding aids in creating more authentic tourism experiences. Addressing the sensitivity surrounding Cyprus's history is crucial given the political divide. This question aims to understand how guides navigate this complex topic with tourists. Cultural exchange reveals how tourists and locals interact, providing a glimpse into how visitors can experience Cyprus on a deeper level. The preservation of heritage requires a strategic approach involving local initiatives. Exploring these efforts reveals the dedication toward maintaining the island's identity. Sustainable practices are essential to protect cultural and natural resources. Identifying these practices sheds light on how Cyprus balances tourism growth with environmental responsibility. Recommendations for further preservation and promotion ensure that the tourism industry remains aligned with the goal of cultural sustainability.

- How Would You Define a Cultural Tourist?

Understanding the concept of a cultural tourist is crucial for designing tourism strategies that align with visitor expectations. Participant 1, a tourism officer, defines cultural tourists as those who seek to involve themselves in the historical and archaeological richness of Cyprus, rather than simply relaxing on the beaches. For her, cultural tourists are "more educated people looking to visit archaeological sites, museums, and monuments." Participant 2, who worked in nautical tourism, expands on this by noting that a cultural tourist is "any human being interested in culture, for example, art, music, habits of the island, and natural environment." He believes these individuals are often motivated to understand Cyprus's traditions and behaviors deeply. Participant 3, an academic, emphasizes that cultural tourists often come "with a purpose to see something more than just a five-star hotel." She suggests these travelers look for "cultural and local experiences," demonstrating their desire for authentic interactions. Participant 4, working in hospitality, sees cultural tourists as those who "are interested in the cultural and historical richness" of the island.

She notes that they appreciate the hospitality industry's ability to help them explore local food, historical tours, and other authentic aspects of Cyprus.

Together, these definitions reveal a consensus that cultural tourists seek more than traditional relaxation, instead aiming to connect with local traditions, food, and historical narratives.

- Are There Any Lesser-Known Cultural Sites or Traditions that You Believe Deserve More Attention from Tourists?

Lesser-known cultural sites often hold unique traditions that tourists may overlook due to more prominent attractions. Participant 1 points to village traditions around major religious festivals, such as Easter and Christmas, where tourists can "engage in preparations for the feasts." She believes these practices offer an insight into Orthodox Christian customs distinct from other branches of Christianity. Participant 2 mentions the Commandaria wine and Lefkara lace traditions. The wine has "been produced for many thousands of years," while Lefkara lace is known for its intricate craftsmanship. He also highlights the importance of shipwreck diving, especially the Zenobia shipwreck. As Participant 3 emphasized before, "almost every place, every village, every little thing has some kind of a history." She notes the local narratives embedded in each local are essential for a holistic understanding of Cyprus's culture. Participant 4 suggests that village festivals in Paphos, where she works, offer a unique way to discover local cuisine, music, and dance.

Each participant recognizes that lesser-known cultural traditions and sites enrich the tourist experience by providing a more comprehensive view of the island's traditions.

- How Important Do You Think Cultural Heritage Is for Tourists Visiting Cyprus?

Cultural heritage is a cornerstone of the island's appeal to tourists. Participant 1 believes that older, more educated tourists are more likely to appreciate Cyprus's cultural depth. They "are looking to visit archaeological sites and museums," especially if they come from Europe, where there is a stronger inclination towards cultural tourism. Participant 2 agrees, noting that the diverse archaeological sites and artifacts spanning millennia captivate tourists. "Tourists, when they want

to have cultural tourism, can follow music operas or theatrical performances in ancient theaters like Kourion," he says, emphasizing the importance of ancient Greek theaters in showcasing heritage. Participant 3 echoes these sentiments, noting that tourists "seek local experiences" to gain a more authentic understanding of Cyprus's culture. They also explore historical narratives to grasp the island's cultural identity. Participant 4 emphasizes the value of cultural tourism for resorts, as it adds a unique layer to the guest experience. She finds that tourists "engage with culture and history more often nowadays to discover something new".

Cultural heritage clearly resonates with tourists visiting Cyprus, especially when it is well-presented and accessible.

- How Do You Navigate the Sensitivities Surrounding Cyprus's Complex History When Discussing Cultural Heritage with Tourists?

The political division of Cyprus presents a delicate issue when discussing the island's heritage with visitors. Participant 1 notes that she does not interact directly with tourists but highlights how the political complexities often arise in cultural exhibitions. Events are designed to include both Greek and Turkish Cypriot elements, ensuring a balanced representation. Participant 2, being from the North, emphasizes the need for honesty when explaining the political situation to tourists. He notes how Greek and Turkish Cypriots share similar cultural values but states that "Turkey has been trying to change most of the names of the villages and streets," making it difficult for tourists to identify places using older maps. Participant 3 mentions that tourists often do not fully understand the political division before arriving, but that festivals and cultural tours provide opportunities to see the attractions on both sides. Participant 4, with her hospitality experience, acknowledges that "visitors don't necessarily see the division." Instead, they often perceive the island as a whole, suggesting that shared traditions can help bridge the divide.

Overall, each participant agrees that sensitivity and balanced representation are crucial when addressing Cyprus's complex history.

- Can You Describe Any Instances Where You've Observed Cultural Exchange Between Visitors and Local Communities During Your Tours?

Cultural exchange offers visitors a chance to connect with local traditions while giving communities a broader worldview. Participant 1 mentions European exchange projects that foster cross-cultural understanding. "Visitors engage with locals through music, dance, food, and nature activities," she says. Participant 2 discusses the appeal of agro-tourism, where visitors "stay in villages on Troodos Mountain to study various techniques of producing perfumes out of roses." He emphasizes how tourists often learn about these traditions directly from the local community. Participant 3 believes the shared festivals between locals and tourists, especially involving food and music, provide meaningful interactions. Participant 4 highlights that at her resort, "we try to involve guests in local traditions through cooking lessons, dance classes, and nature tours." This approach not only entertains but also educates guests about the local culture.

Cultural exchange offers a valuable two-way experience, giving tourists authentic insights while allowing locals to share their rich traditions.

- How is Cultural Heritage Preserved in Cyprus? Are There Any Specific Initiatives You're Involved In?

Preserving Cyprus's heritage requires careful management and strategic collaboration. Participant 1 notes that the Antiquities Department oversees museums and archaeological sites in the Republic, which ensures that these sites are maintained according to international standards. She mentions UNESCO-protected areas like Paphos as exemplary models. Participant 2 acknowledges that while Turkish and Greek Cypriots try to preserve their heritage, the political divide complicates the situation. He notes that "the Turkish culture, the Turkish way of governance, is blocking the whole existence of the two communities on the island." However, he is optimistic about the ongoing efforts of preservation organizations. Participant 3 mentions her involvement in academic projects focused on heritage conservation and cross-cultural understanding. Participant 4 notes that her resort works closely with local organizations to promote festivals and sponsor exhibitions that celebrate Cypriot culture. This collaboration helps keep local traditions alive and engages tourists in authentic experiences.

These initiatives demonstrate a collaborative approach to preserving heritage, balancing government efforts with grassroots activities.

- Can You Name Some Sustainable Tourism Practices in Cyprus?

Sustainable tourism practices ensure that cultural and natural resources remain intact for future generations. Participant 1 mentions that recycling and beach cleaning initiatives are becoming more widespread. She admits that while "we can give the guidelines to the hoteliers and restaurants," their engagement in sustainability varies. Participant 2 is particularly focused on maintaining the maritime environment. He mentions that "we are trying to enrich the fish stock by using cleaned-up ships," which are sunk in carefully chosen locations to create artificial reefs. These reefs also become popular diving spots, combining environmental and economic benefits. Participant 3 highlights agro-tourism initiatives that encourage tourists to stay in mountain villages, providing income for rural communities while reducing the environmental impact. Participant 4 emphasizes how hospitality businesses are increasingly adopting eco-friendly practices like reducing plastic waste and sourcing local ingredients. "We've shifted towards providing more eco-friendly and culturally rich experiences," she says.

These practices show how sustainable tourism is not just about protecting the environment but also supporting local economies.

- Can You Provide Any Recommendations for the Tourism Industry to Further Preserve and Promote the Cultural Identity on the Island?

Participant 1 recommends a more significant focus on sustainability and proactive marketing. She believes that people "are not aware of the cultural depth of Cyprus," emphasizing the need for technology like augmented reality to bring cultural sites to life. Participant 2 believes quality should be prioritized over quantity in tourism. "They have to measure tourism by the income but then calculate the expense," he says, noting the high costs associated with over-tourism. Participant 3 recommends strengthening academic partnerships to better document cultural heritage and integrate those narratives into tourism packages. Participant 4 suggests more

collaboration between luxury resorts and local organizations to host cultural events. This approach promotes local identity while enriching the guest experience.

These recommendations underscore the need for strategic thinking to balance cultural preservation with sustainable growth.

Set 3: Differences Between North and South Cyprus

This set of questions about the differences between North and South Cyprus aims to explore how political division impacts tourism patterns, cultural identity, and the broader economic landscape on the island. The first question, "Why do you think South Cyprus is more visited?" examines the accessibility, safety, and infrastructure of the South compared to the North. Understanding these factors establishes a baseline for analyzing how the geopolitical situation shapes tourism flows and influences travelers' perceptions. The question about the differences in cultural identity seeks to uncover how the political division has shaped Greek and Turkish Cypriots' identities on both sides of the island. Despite shared cultural values, religious, linguistic, and historical differences distinguish the two communities. This exploration aims to understand how these differences manifest and how each side approaches cultural promotion. Next, the question about which side focuses more on cultural tourism is crucial for comparing their respective strategies. Cultural tourism is essential to promoting the island's rich heritage. Examining the approaches and challenges each region faces provides insight into their marketing strategies, government priorities, and specific obstacles to preserving and promoting unique cultural elements. The question about the challenges facing the tourism industry is essential because it addresses multifaceted issues stemming from geopolitical, environmental, and economic factors. Understanding the challenges helps identify key hurdles to growth and sustainability, allowing the industry to adopt a more strategic approach to tourism development. Economic benefits of tourism are crucial for understanding the importance of the sector to Cyprus's economy. By supporting local businesses, creating employment opportunities, and providing substantial government revenue, tourism plays a significant role in maintaining stability and sustaining essential infrastructure. Examining these benefits helps highlight how both regions can maximize their economic potential. Finally, the question about the most popular cultural events in Cyprus captures how different celebrations and festivals reveal the island's cultural spirit. From village festivals to

large-scale performances, these events illustrate the island's ability to blend traditional and contemporary influences while attracting diverse tourist demographics.

- Why Do You Think South Cyprus is More Visited?

Political division significantly affects tourism in Cyprus, with the South generally more visited than the North. Participant 1, a tourism officer, attributes this to accessibility and the political situation. "You have to come to the Republic of Cyprus first and then get a permit to visit the occupied part," she explains, noting the complexities for tourists trying to visit the North. This mandatory requirement ensures that many tourists explore the South first and may not proceed further. Participant 2, a nautical tourism expert, believes that safety and infrastructure in the South make it more attractive. "On the free part of Cyprus, a tourist feels quite safe and knows that anything happening... will be effective," he says. Conversely, he explains that "the Turkish army is actually controlling most of the activities happening there," creating an environment where tourists feel less secure. Participant 3, an academic living in the North, emphasizes the accessibility and regulation in the South. The region is integrated with the European Union and follows international standards, creating a reliable environment for tourists. She notes that "people have their reservations about the North due to political restrictions and potential safety issues." Participant 4, working in hospitality, shares similar views, pointing to the range of established luxury accommodations and organized tours in the South. She says, "We try to ensure that our guests enjoy their stay and engage in local activities, which I think a lot of other hotels are doing too," highlighting the importance of tourists having the best time possible.

The shared insights from these four participants demonstrate that accessibility, safety, and infrastructure are the key reasons why the South is more frequently visited. The South has the advantage of being easily reachable, backed by international standards, and offering luxurious accommodations, ensuring an enjoyable and enriching experience for all types of visitors. Moreover, the political situation directly influences the perception of the North, reinforcing the preference for the South among tourists.

- How Do You Perceive the Differences in Cultural Identity Between the Greek and Turkish Sides of Cyprus?

The political division between the North and South of Cyprus has led to notable differences in cultural identity. Participant 1 mentions that Greek and Turkish Cypriots historically lived together harmoniously, with little difference in terms of attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs. "The things that we differ in are our language and religion," she notes, highlighting Orthodox Christianity and Islam as distinct identifiers. Participant 2 agrees, emphasizing that Turkish Cypriots share many of the same values as Greek Cypriots. "Both share almost the same culture and cherish education," he notes, pointing out how both communities invest heavily in their children's education. He adds that "Turkish Cypriots are much closer to the citizens of the free part of Cyprus," implying a sense of shared values. Participant 3 emphasizes that cultural identity remains complex despite political tensions. "There's a strong sense of community and shared cultural values across the island," she says, noting that cultural identity often transcends political boundaries. Festivals, local gatherings, and shared traditions maintain a sense of unity. Participant 4 observes that the political divide hasn't entirely erased the shared influences. "A lot of visitors don't even know about the division, but it's important" she explains. Instead, tourists perceive the island as a rich cultural blend of Greek and Turkish influences.

Despite distinct political differences, these perspectives reflect how shared cultural values still resonate across Cyprus. Greek and Turkish Cypriots continue to share educational priorities and mutual respect for traditions. They have maintained a unified identity, with both groups enjoying cultural gatherings and working collaboratively to celebrate their heritage. However, the historical and religious differences, such as the Turkish adherence to Islam and Greek Orthodox Christianity, are notable but have not led to complete fragmentation.

- Which Side Do You Think Focuses More on Cultural Tourism?

Tourism is a critical economic driver for Cyprus, and cultural tourism is particularly crucial given the island's rich heritage. Participant 1 is uncertain about the North's approach but believes the South takes cultural tourism more seriously. She points out that the Republic has created a Deputy Ministry of Culture to focus on cultural preservation and tourism. "We've been trying to promote culture and cultural tourism together, creating new events and additional cultural routes," she says. The South's concerted efforts toward incorporating its cultural heritage into the tourist experience demonstrate its commitment to promoting cultural tourism. Participant 2 is more direct

in his assessment, suggesting that cultural tourism is challenging in the North due to Turkey's efforts to transform the cultural landscape. "Turkey has done a lot of destructive things here" he says, implying that the cultural identity has shifted significantly. He believes the South is more consistent in maintaining its cultural tourism strategy. These changes make it challenging to promote authentic cultural experiences, which diminishes the region's overall attractiveness for tourists seeking such experiences. Participant 3, despite living in the North, also feels the South is more organized in promoting cultural tourism. "The South has been actively advocating for more attention to cultural tourism" she says. By aligning these packages with tourist interests, the South is better able to cater to various visitor profiles and ensure a more fulfilling and immersive travel experience. Participant 4 confirms this, explaining how organized tours, cultural festivals, and collaborations with local organizations have made the South more effective in cultural tourism. By partnering with local organizations and leveraging regional events, the South creates diverse opportunities for tourists to explore the island's cultural richness.

These perspectives indicate a consensus that the South has invested more resources in promoting cultural tourism. The South's efforts to promote its heritage through governmental support, organized tours, and local partnerships contrast with the North, where tourism efforts are hindered by Turkey's influence.

- What Are the Challenges Facing the Tourism Industry in Cyprus?

Tourism in Cyprus faces several challenges, often influenced by political factors and global trends. Participant 1 points out that "we had the pandemic, economic crisis, and the war in Ukraine," which have impacted tourism in Cyprus. She adds that cancellations and rising prices have created further difficulties in maintaining stable tourist numbers. The recent economic disruptions highlight how external factors can create unforeseen challenges for the tourism sector, requiring greater flexibility and resilience in managing these issues. Participant 2 identifies political occupation as the primary challenge for Cyprus. "The occupation of 36% of the island creates difficulties," he explains, as it limits access to parts of the island, reducing the potential for tourism growth. Additionally, security concerns make it challenging to attract tourists who may perceive the North as unstable. Participant 3 believes that the political situation remains a significant hurdle, but environmental challenges like water scarcity and rising temperatures also affect the industry.

"Climate change is becoming a more serious problem," she notes, highlighting the need for sustainable tourism practices. The increasing demand for water-intensive tourist activities, like golfing and luxury resorts, is also straining resources, necessitating a more environmentally conscious approach. Participant 4 emphasizes the importance of managing the "carrying capacity" of the island to ensure that mass tourism does not damage cultural sites and environmental resources. She says, "There must be careful control on reducing mass tourism" suggesting limits on tourist numbers are essential. The island must balance the benefits of increased tourist arrivals with the preservation of its natural and cultural attractions.

These challenges reveal the multi-faceted nature of the difficulties facing tourism in Cyprus. Political instability, economic disruptions, and environmental degradation are significant threats to the sector's sustainability. Therefore, solutions must consider these diverse aspects and ensure a coordinated, multi-disciplinary approach to safeguarding the industry.

- What Are the Economic Benefits of Tourism in Cyprus?

Tourism is a crucial economic driver for Cyprus, providing jobs and supporting local businesses. Participant 1 estimates that "40% of our income comes from tourism," emphasizing the industry's direct impact on the economy. This income sustains essential infrastructure, services, and hospitality establishments that cater to a broad range of tourist demographics. Participant 2 believes tourism supports local employment by creating job opportunities in coastal and mountainous regions. He highlights that efforts to maintain a balanced economy help sustain livelihoods even in rural areas. These areas depend heavily on tourist spending, especially in the hospitality and retail sectors. Participant 3 mentions how tourism diversification provides different opportunities for local businesses, from agro-tourism to diving schools. These niche markets attract tourists interested in specific activities, spreading economic benefits across the island. The presence of niche markets ensures that rural and less-developed regions can also share the benefits of increased tourism, reducing economic disparities. Participant 4 explains that luxury resorts also have a significant economic impact, drawing high-net-worth tourists who contribute directly to local businesses through dining and shopping. This spending trickles down into the local economy, generating income for multiple sectors and helping maintain higher standards of living.

These perspectives show how tourism in Cyprus supports diverse economic activities across various regions, making it an essential pillar of the island's economy. The economic contributions range from essential job creation to niche market support, enriching the island's economic fabric and enhancing prosperity in rural areas.

- What Are the Most Popular Cultural Events in Cyprus?

Cultural events help showcase Cyprus's heritage, providing tourists with immersive experiences. Participant 1 notes that "the largest one is the international Greek Drama Festival, which happens in July." The festival brings together theater groups worldwide to reinterpret ancient Greek drama, offering an insightful perspective on classical works. Participant 2 mentions the "opera in Paphos in September" as a key cultural event. He believes that performances at ancient sites create a unique atmosphere that attracts visitors interested in music and history. This event complements the island's classical heritage, inviting audiences to enjoy top-tier musical performances in a historic setting. Participant 3 emphasizes the smaller village festivals, which celebrate local traditions through food, music, and dance. These events provide tourists with a more intimate glimpse of Cypriot culture. They allow tourists to interact directly with local traditions and people, offering personalized insights into Cyprus's rich heritage. Participant 4 agrees, highlighting the collaborations between luxury resorts and local organizations in organizing cultural events. This partnership ensures that guests are introduced to local festivals while enjoying their stay. By making cultural experiences accessible through resorts, the collaboration fosters a broader understanding and appreciation of Cyprus's diverse cultural traditions.

These cultural events showcase Cyprus's ability to blend traditional and contemporary elements, enriching the tourist experience with both world-class festivals and local celebrations. Whether tourists are interested in large-scale performances or intimate village gatherings, Cyprus offers a rich tapestry of cultural events catering to a diverse range of interests.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, the aim is to summarize the findings and implications of the research presented in this dissertation. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the differences

between North and South Cyprus, this section concludes key insights from the participant interviews and literature review. It will offer a conclusion of the project's main findings concerning the island's cultural identity, tourism disparities, and sustainability efforts. Additionally, the chapter will reflect on the limitations of the research and provide recommendations for future studies that can enhance the strategic development of tourism in Cyprus.

5.1 Overview of Findings and Implications

The exploration of Cyprus's tourism industry through literature and interviews with four participants has provided valuable insights into the cultural identity, heritage preservation, and disparities between the North and South of the island. This comprehensive conclusion combines findings from the literature review and the interviews to answer the three primary research questions.

RQ1: How does Cyprus's cultural identity differentiate it from other destinations, and what role does its uniqueness play in attracting visitors?

Cyprus's cultural identity stands out due to its blend of historical layers, geographical diversity, and rich traditions (Edquist and Holmén, 2015). Participant 1 emphasized how Cyprus's "archaeological sites that are dated like almost 12,000 years" offer historical treasures that few other destinations can match. The literature review supports this, highlighting the role of geographical and historical influences from Greek, Ottoman, and British occupiers (Nunkoo et al., 2010). Despite political tensions, Participant 3 noted a strong sense of community, underscoring a shared cultural identity that transcends political divides. Participant 4 found that tourists perceive the island as a rich cultural blend of Greek and Turkish influences, offering unique traditions and narratives. Therefore, Cyprus's cultural identity plays a significant role in attracting visitors seeking to explore this blend of diverse traditions, food, and historical richness. Cyprus's uniqueness also lies in its ability to offer a cohesive travel experience with diverse attractions. Participant 2 noted the geographical proximity of various environments, stating that visitors could "snow at Troodos Mountain and within 20 minutes go down to the coast and dive," illustrating how short distances enhance visitor exploration. This sentiment aligns with literature that highlights Cyprus's natural appeal in drawing tourists with outdoor interests (Sayeh, 2022). This diversity complements its

historical and cultural richness, creating a holistic travel experience. The local traditions and festivals further contribute to Cyprus's cultural identity. Participants described how village celebrations provide tourists with intimate glimpses into regional life. From local Easter and Christmas traditions (Participant 1) to shared Greek drama festivals and opera performances (Participants 2 and 3), tourists are offered a wide range of events that showcase the island's cultural spirit.

RQ2: How is Cyprus's cultural heritage preserved within the tourism industry, and what strategies ensure its sustainability amidst changing tourist demands?

Heritage preservation in Cyprus relies on both government initiatives and grassroots efforts. Participant 1 mentioned how the Antiquities Department maintains sites according to international standards, while Participant 4 noted partnerships with local organizations to sponsor exhibitions. The literature review highlighted the importance of digitalization (Yeniasır and Gökbulut, 2022), which helps create broader educational access and visibility for lesser-known sites. Sustainable practices such as recycling, artificial reefs (Participant 2), and agro-tourism initiatives (Participant 3) ensure that tourism activities align with environmental stewardship and economic benefits (Sayeh, 2022). Addressing the sensitivity surrounding the island's political history is vital. Participants noted that incorporating both Greek and Turkish elements in exhibitions helps navigate the complexities. Therefore, strategic collaboration across regions and organizations helps maintain and promote heritage while meeting changing tourist demands. The interviewees highlighted several practical strategies to preserve heritage. Participant 3's emphasis on village festivals points to community-driven celebrations, ensuring that cultural events remain relevant and authentic. Participant 4's recommendation of partnerships between resorts and local organizations highlights a commercial approach where tourism stakeholders work together to provide guests with genuine cultural experiences. Participant 2's insights on environmental preservation through agro-tourism and maritime activities show how sustainable practices can complement cultural tourism. The literature reinforces the idea that local initiatives and international standards must complement each other to preserve Cyprus's heritage. Combining strategic government support with grassroots festivals and digital visibility could enable the island to maintain its cultural legacy for future generations.

RQ3: What are the cultural and economic disparities between the South and North sides, and how do these differences impact tourism development?

The literature review and interviews revealed distinct cultural and economic disparities. Participant 1 pointed out how tourists must often come to the Republic of Cyprus first before gaining permits for the North, creating logistical challenges. Meanwhile, Participant 3 noted that the South's integration with international standards and EU regulations makes it a more reliable tourist destination. These differences in accessibility, safety, and infrastructure mean that the South attracts more visitors. Economically, Participant 2 emphasized that the South is "much closer to the citizens of the free part of Cyprus," offering greater integration into global markets. Northern Cyprus remains primarily dependent on Turkey, which restricts its access to markets and global investment (Isik, 2013). These economic disparities have led to a situation where the South focuses on sustainable tourism initiatives while the North faces infrastructural and strategic challenges. Despite these challenges, both regions share similar values and traditions, offering a foundation for potential collaboration. Participant 4 suggested more partnerships between luxury resorts and local organizations to promote shared festivals. However, Turkey's influence on renaming towns and cultural sites creates barriers to promoting authentic cultural tourism in the North (Participant 2). Culturally, the historical divide between the two regions has resulted in unique characteristics shaping each side's identity. The South is known for Greek Orthodox Christianity, while the North adheres to Islam. This religious difference impacts tourism in several ways, influencing visitors' perceptions of the regions. However, the interviews revealed how these differences have not prevented shared values from prevailing across both communities. Participant 3 noted the continued respect for education and family traditions on both sides, suggesting that collaboration could occur through these shared values. The literature review further emphasizes that despite the political differences, both regions could align their cultural efforts to attract more tourists (Nunkoo et al., 2010).

5.2 Limitations

One of the primary limitations encountered in this study was the difficulty in recruiting participants for the interviews. Finding professionals willing to contribute their time and insights proved challenging, primarily due to the busy nature of their roles within the tourism industry.

Many potential interviewees were often unavailable due to their commitments, which coincided with the data collection phase of this research. This timing issue not only limited the number of participants who could engage but also restricted the diversity of perspectives that might have been obtained during a less busy period.

Additionally, the small sample size of the study poses a limitation in terms of the generalizability of the findings. With only four participants, while offering in-depth insights, the scope to draw broader conclusions about the tourism industry in Cyprus is somewhat restricted. The views expressed are rich and detailed but are representative of only a handful of professionals. This limitation is significant, as a larger number of participants might provide a more comprehensive view of the industry's challenges and opportunities, reflecting a wider range of experiences and opinions. Another challenge was the geographical concentration of the participants. All the interviewees are based in areas that are key tourist destinations within Cyprus. As such, their perspectives might be biased towards these regions' specific conditions and may not entirely reflect the situation in less frequented areas of the island. This geographic focus could influence the study's findings, skewing them towards more tourist-centric views and potentially overlooking the nuances present in other parts of Cyprus that are less reliant on or affected by tourism. Moreover, the political sensitivities and historical complexities of Cyprus, particularly concerning the division of the island, presented challenges in how freely participants felt they could express their views. Some participants were cautious, and some were biased in discussing topics related to the north-south divide, which might have limited the depth of insight into how these issues impact the tourism sector across the entire island.

These limitations draws more attention the need for cautious interpretation of the study's findings and suggest areas for further research, potentially involving a broader and more diverse group of participants across different regions within Cyprus.

6. Summary

Cyprus, a Mediterranean island at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, presents a rich blend of cultural heritage and history shaped by centuries of geopolitical interactions and strategic significance. This thesis investigates the island's intricate cultural identity and the impact of tourism on sustainability and heritage preservation. It explores how these factors intertwine with the island's

economy, analyzing the literature on tourism definitions, impacts, and emerging trends. The study integrates qualitative data from interviews with tourism professionals to contextualize the findings within broader academic discourse.

In the literature review, the concept of cultural tourism is defined as engaging with a destination's living culture, historical sites, and local customs. It reveals that cultural tourists range from casual visitors to purposeful enthusiasts, highlighting the need for tourism managers to cater to diverse motivations. The review also provides a comprehensive analysis of Cyprus's tourism statistics, noting a significant growth in tourist arrivals and economic contributions despite challenges posed by seasonality and sustainability. The nation's unique geopolitical situation and advantageous location drive its appeal, yet issues like environmental degradation and resource overuse during peak seasons are challenges that must be managed.

The exploration of island identity reveals how historical interactions and strategic positioning have woven a distinct cultural fabric across the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. Despite the division between the Republic of Cyprus in the south and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, recognized only by Turkey, the thesis highlights the shared cultural and historical narratives that shape the identities of both regions. Cyprus's economic dependency on tourism has reinforced this identity through efforts to adapt to global economic demands. However, the study emphasizes the unique challenges posed by the geopolitical division, particularly the challenges of integrating cultural tourism across a politically divided island.

In considering the importance of heritage preservation, the thesis recognizes the critical role of safeguarding both tangible and intangible cultural artifacts. Digitization, sustainable tourism, and educational initiatives emerge as effective strategies for involving tourists and locals in preserving the island's cultural assets. This approach connects local history to global audiences, reinforcing support for conservation and fostering community pride. The thesis finds that tourism plays a vital role in Cyprus's economy, directly and indirectly impacting various sectors, from agriculture to hospitality. Infrastructure developments improve the accessibility and efficiency of transportation networks, benefiting tourists and local communities alike. However, the research emphasizes the critical need for sustainable practices to minimize resource-intensive tourism's environmental impacts while balancing economic development. The geopolitical dynamics of

Cyprus, particularly in Northern Cyprus, shape tourism strategies and policies, highlighting the region's political significance and economic potential.

To address the environmental, economic, and geopolitical challenges facing Cyprus's tourism sector, the thesis advocates for a sustainable tourism model that benefits all stakeholders. The expansion into diverse tourism branches such as wine, gastro, agro, and pescatourism offers a path toward enriching the tourist experience while extending the tourist season and ensuring sustainable economic development. Collaborative efforts involving government entities, the private sector, and local communities are essential in achieving these objectives. In the research methodology section, the thesis employs semi-structured interviews to gain qualitative insights from tourism professionals. This method showcases the various perspectives within Cyprus's tourism industry, capturing first-hand experiences and the impact of tourism on cultural preservation and sustainability. The interview data enriches academic exploration, offering a grounded perspective that reveals the challenges and trends shaping the industry.

Ultimately, this study concludes that sustainable tourism practices in Cyprus can effectively merge technology, education, and cross-cultural collaboration to preserve cultural heritage while enhancing the tourism experience. Despite the island's political complexities, its rich cultural and natural resources provide opportunities to create a sustainable and resilient tourism sector that honors its diverse history. The strategic use of these assets can pave the way for a sustainable future that celebrates Cyprus's historical narratives while aligning with global tourism trends and economic stability.

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