

Showcasing & Leveraging Intangible Cultural Heritage for the Destination Marketing of Corfu



Τμήμα Τουρισμού

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INTRODUCTION

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) constitutes and is constituted, at the same time, by the elements of cultural identity and place meaning. Traditions, rituals, myths, folklore, and collective narratives can shape how destinations are perceived both by residents and visitors.

Corfu possesses a rich and multilayered intangible heritage deposit expressed through local myths, festivals, village customs, and cultural rituals. Despite this abundance, the strategic use of these cultural resources in destination marketing remains limited.

This research investigates how intangible cultural heritage can contribute to destination branding and sustainable tourism development in Corfu. The study also explores how local narratives and myths can strengthen the island's tourism identity while simultaneously safeguarding cultural authenticity.

OBJECTIVES

- To explore the role of ICH in shaping Corfu's tourism identity.
- To examine the use of myths, legends, and folklore in destination branding.
- To investigate perceptions of tourism stakeholders and cultural organizations regarding ICH and tourism development.
- To propose strategies - or even concepts - for the sustainable integration of ICH into destination marketing.

METHODOLOGY

This study is informed by secondary data derived from the existing literature, while the primary research follows a Grounded Theory approach.

- Qualitative Research: 20 semi-structured in-depth anonymous interviews with tourism suppliers & cultural actors.
- Thematic Analysis, Open - Axial - Selective coding.
- Big Data Analysis
- Natural Language Processing

KEY FINDINGS

- Myths as Experiential Capital**
Local myths function as experiential assets that enrich the visitor experience and destination meaning.
- Storytelling Micro-Elements**
Small narrative elements embedded in everyday practices subtly shape the destination story.
- Emotional Immersion & Engagement**
Myth-based narratives foster emotional connection and deeper visitor engagement.
- Fragmented Branding**
Cultural narratives exist but remain dispersed and insufficiently integrated into destination branding.
- Myths & Legends as Lived Obligation**
Myths are perceived not only as stories but as cultural responsibilities carried by local communities.
- Ritual Embodiment & Transmission**
Traditions and rituals transmit I.C.H through embodied practices and intergenerational participation.
- Authenticity as Participation**
Authenticity emerges through active participation rather than passive observation.
- Concern about Spectacle**
Stakeholders express concern that tourism may mutate I.C.H into staged spectacle.



PUBLICATIONS & CONFERENCES

- "Echoes of the Past: Weaving Corfu's Myths into Sustainable Tourism" has been submitted to special issue titled: "Fantasy Tourism - Storytelling, Heritage, Meaning-Making, Ecologies and Futures" (Pending).
- "Between Living Traditions and Destination Branding: Negotiating Intangible Cultural Heritage in Corfu's Tourism Discourse" (Pending).
- 2nd Intocus International Conference - Heritage, Cultural Tourism, and Sustainability, 27th & 28th February 2026, Athens, Greece, Harokopio University (GR), Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne (FR), University of The Aegean (GR), Hellenic Open University (GR), "Between Living Traditions and Destination Branding: Negotiating Intangible Cultural Heritage in Corfu's Tourism Discourse" (Part of the study).



CONCLUSIONS

This research so far highlights the significant potential of I.C.H as a strategic resource for destination marketing in Corfu by demonstrating the theory of a "Latant Narrative Reservoir" for every mature destination and develops the concept of "Corfu's Mythic Double Helix".

Future work will focus on:

- Completing thematic data analysis
- Developing a comprehensive conceptual framework
- Integrating findings into a strategic model for destination marketing based on storytelling and intangible heritage

The research aims to contribute both to academic discussions on heritage tourism and to practical strategies for sustainable destination development.



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Ημέρα Έρευνας 2026

Τρίτη 17 Μαρτίου 2026 - Ιόνιο Πανεπιστήμιο

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