Experiential Marketing and Cultural Routes

The Case Study of the Routes of the Olive Tree

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Abstract

Given the increasing attention put on the experience economy and the market of experiences, on one hand, and on cultural routes as an emerging, alternative form of tourism, on the other, in this master thesis researchers set out to explore the use that a cultural route makes of experiences to market and differentiate itself, and what related challenges and issues can be identified.

As the researchers were particularly interested in generating in-depth data, a single case study was chosen, with the case being one of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, the Routes of the Olive Tree. Theoretical propositions were developed in order to guide the analysis, in advance, on the basis of some of the most discussed concepts in experiential marketing for tourism, such as experiential realms, theming, representation and conveyance of the experience, staging of the experience and experiential marketing tools. Primary data was collected on the field from four different sources of data: participant observation, interviews, texts and netnography. Data from these different sources was consequently triangulated in order to generate multifaceted findings, which could help the researchers in their aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the case. Although this research does not aim at generalizing the findings on other cultural routes, it is argued that it can provide useful, exhaustive context-based knowledge in what remains, today, an underdeveloped area of research.

Findings indicate that, although the Routes of the Olive Tree develops, indeed, a route experience that is used to differentiate itself, many issues and challenges arise that need to be considered: particularly, the cultural route's lack of direct control of the environment in which it is situated, a lack of funding and finally a lack of expertise can undermine the capacity for the cultural route to market and differentiate itself through experiences. In addition, peculiarities of the management of the route, such as its non-profit nature, need to be better considered and acknowledged in the literature, as these usually affect, in a similar vein, the capacity of the cultural route to market experiences and differentiate itself.

Keywords: *cultural route, experience, Routes of the Olive Tree, challenges, differentiation, experiential marketing*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Towards an alternative kind of tourism

Nowadays, European institutions have been highlighting the critical need for destinations to innovate and differentiate their products (Karyopouli and Koutra 2012), due to seasonality and sustainability issues, but also due to the diversity in consumer's preferences and the need to develop alternative forms of tourism (Apostolopoulos and Sönmez 2000; Bramwell 2002). The birth of alternative tourism as a way to diminish mass tourism's negative impacts on the destinations' economy, community and environment is highlighted by a number of researchers (Dernoi 1981; Dearden and Harron 1994; Tsartas et al. 2001).

The concept of cultural tourism is generally considered to be different than traditional mass tourism: cultural tourism, in particular, is argued to be able to contribute to countering seasonality, to vehicle economic and urban regeneration and to promote culture, helping in revitalizing cultural facilities and creating new ones (Richards and Bonink 1994). Cultural tourism is growing faster than any other tourism segment (Cisneros-Martínez and Fernández-Morales 2015) and has become a major segment in most tourism destinations, which are progressively interested in its recognized, related positive aspects: the contemporary cultural tourist is generally more educated, experienced and respectful of other cultures, increasingly motivated in experiencing and learning about different cultures (Debes 2011; Cisneros-Martínez and Fernández-Morales 2015), and this underlines the possibility of a positive match between sustainable development and current market demand.

1.2. Cultural routes

Given the framework pictured above, an area of interest in the development of cultural tourism can be seen in cultural routes. A definition of cultural routes is given by the international scientific CIIC- ICOMOS Committee in its draft about international charter on cultural routes (2008): "Any route of communication, be it land, water, or some other type, which is physically delimited and also characterized by having its own specific dynamic and historic functionality, which must fulfill the following conditions: It must arise from and reflect interactive movements of people as well as multi-dimensional, continuous, and reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, knowledge and values

between peoples, countries, regions or continents over significant periods of time. It must have thereby promoted a cross-fertilization of the affected cultures in space and time, as reflected both in their tangible and intangible heritage".

Cultural routes are therefore thought to be "both a geographical journey through a territory and therefore through plural local identities, but also a mental journey with representative values, meanings, expectations, experiences, and finally a tourism product" (Majdoub, 2011:30). Consequently, cultural routes represent a new approach to the notion of cultural tourism and are considered to be a source for a new kind of tourism development (Khovanova-Rubicondo 2012).

More than being just a product related with cultural tourism, cultural routes implement a unique, highly differentiated mix of cultural, food, heritage, rural and nature tourism. They are able to attract customers of high expenditure rates, to a product whose competitiveness is proportional, among other factors, to its community and environmental sustainability (Hardy 2003). Apart from being seen as another highly attractive means of developing destinations, they also diversify supply "by accessing new tourism segments; they make it possible to spread demand across seasons, since cultural tourism can be consumed at different times throughout the year; they strengthen the branding of the destination; and they can complement previously consolidated products, thus improving and expanding travelers' experiences" (UNWTO 2015:51). Routes are also able to connect tourists to locations normally left isolated from mainstream products, triggering regional development of small and medium SMEs (Small & Medium Enterprises) and attracting further investments to often depressed rural areas, while critically contributing in protecting cultural and heritage resources (Ducassi and Rosa 2005; Briedenhann and Wickens 2004; Nagy, 2012; Karyopouli and Koutra 2012).

In Europe, cultural routes are seen as a tool for the promotion of the local area and have an enormous potential to carry on themes of European culture, as pointed out by a comprehensive study report on European Cultural Routes named "Impact of European Cultural Routes on SMEs' innovation and competitiveness" (Khovanova-Rubicondo et. al. 2011). As a matter of fact, their development attracts funds and resources from the European Union, as they form a significant opportunity of economic and cultural development for the whole Europe (Ibid). The Council of Europe established the European Cultural Routes program in 1987, with the Camino de Santiago de Compostela becoming the first certified Cultural Route. Nowadays, the Council aims at the enhancement of a common framework for Cultural Routes in Europe and the growth of the existing

portfolio, which can count on 29 certified routes (Ibid). The study confirmed the highly positive impact on the development of cultural tourism, SMEs creation and regional wealth in Mediterranean destinations, as well as in the whole EU. On the other hand, challenges that need to be addressed in the immediate future have emerged, including issues related with the marketing aspects of the routes.

1.3. Marketing cultural routes for tourists

What tourists seek today, more than in the past, are products and communications that dazzle senses, stimulate minds and touch hearts (Schmitt, 1999; Prentice, 2001; Lagiewski and Zekan, 2006; Majdoub, 2011). There is, particularly, a major demand for experiences in the tourism industry, especially for markets of interests for cultural routes (Prentice 2001). Such demand in "experience" as a theoretical concept follows the recent stream of "experience economy", as described by Pine and Gilmore (1999) and Schmitt (1999) drawing from the early research of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982). What is claimed is that traditional goods-dominant logics have been gradually transformed into service-dominant ones, concerned to co-create experiences with the customers, building strong value prepositions (Tynan and McKechnie 2009).

Consequently, marketing of experiences or "experiential marketing" has been widely discussed in the marketing literature and a lot of academics but also tourism planners have acknowledged the significance of creating a closer bond between the customer and the brand, by immersing them into a memorable experience (Hayes and MacLeod 2006, Lagiewski and Zekan 2006; Schmitt 1999; Tynan and McKechnie 2009). Yet, a lot of questions are raised regarding the applicability of experiential marketing in tourism. This is, partly, due to the difficulties in applying traditional product-oriented marketing theories, strategies and tools to destinations and their cultural assets, given their qualitatively different nature and implications (Pike 2005; Ren and Blichfeldt 2011). For instance, engagement of senses may be difficult to apply to a destination as a whole, due to its complexity (Lagiewski and Zekan 2006).

This is even more valid for cultural routes: their disperse nature, their peculiar, ever-changing and sometimes conflictual product mix (Graham and Murray 1997) make up a complicated setting for a proper marketing strategy. Cultural routes are said to be "complex territorial systems", offering a great mix of products and services (Berti 2013:1) and, thus, marketing themselves as a singular memorable experience seems to be a great challenge.

Despite such challenging environment for marketers, the implementation of experiential marketing in cultural routes appears to be one of the most important within an effective cultural routes development and management framework. This is for at least three reasons. First, marketing in general is recognized as a critical factor for a long-term success and sustainability of the route, both in the literature (Hardy 2003; Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Nagy 2012; Moscardo 2005) and in the study report of Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. (2011). Second, as explained above, experience as a concept is increasingly important in the marketing literature, which practitioners should consider as a core factor in the development of a marketing strategy. Third, because as pointed out by scholars such as Murray and Graham (1997), Majdoub (2011), Zabbini (2012) and Mariotti (2012), cultural routes should not be considered by developers only a cultural consumption product, but also a form of multifaceted experience. Therefore, a major challenge for cultural routes is not only to implement effective marketing and branding strategies as critical factors for the success of the route, but to implement strategies that efficiently convey the experience -the gestalt of the route- to potential tourists (Schmitt 1999).

1.4. Problem Formulation

Although many authors have recognized the importance of differentiating services and products through using experiences, limited research work has been undertaken and very little has been applied to a tourist destination. We have only identified a limited number of studies that discuss the practical use of experiences as a differentiation tool in marketing a single town “as a whole” (Lagiewski and Zekan 2006) rural tourism in general (Fiore et. al. 2007) or trails (Hayes and MacLeod 2006). However, these studies, although valuable, are limited primarily due to the absence of sufficiently elaborated and thorough analysis related to the use of experiences in marketing and differentiation. Moreover, no studies related to such use of experiences on cultural routes have been detected.

Considering their complexity and the challenging environment in which they operate (Majdoub 2011; Berti 2013), we believe it is interesting to go one step further and by doing a field work and collecting primary data to investigate in depth how experiences are used in the context of a cultural route. Furthermore, given cultural routes' peculiarities and the lack of similar research, it is also interesting to thoroughly explore the problematic areas that can be identified.

The focus of the present research is on a cultural route that stands as a single case study. ***The Routes of the Olive Tree*** founded in 1998 and based in Kalamata, Greece, is one of the 29 European Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe and it will be the focus of this master thesis. In 2011, when the study report was published by the Council of Europe (Khovanova-Rubicondo et. al. 2011: 178), it was mentioned that the Routes of the Olive Tree was not at that time "a marketable route, which cultural tourists could undertake (although plans [were] under way to develop local regional routes in Messenia)". Therefore, we have become curious in finding out how this Cultural Route has used and uses experiences to market these local regional routes and differentiate itself from mass tourism products but also other similar alternative tourism products. This thesis sets out to explore particular key aspects related to experiential marketing, which include: areas of experience, authenticity, theming, representation of messages sent to the visitors, staging and marketing tools. We have chosen to focus on these particular aspects, as they have been defined by a significant number of authors (Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Lagievski and Zekan 2006; Williams 2006 Smilansky 2009; Tynian and McKechnie 2009; Majdoub 2011; Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011; Hardy 2003) to be necessary for tourism organizations to market a unique and highly differentiated experience.

More precisely, we will assess which aspects of experience the Routes of the Olive Tree covers for its visitors and how these aspects act as a source of differentiation. Furthermore, it is determinant to explore the perceptions the Routes of the Olive Tree has about theming the route experience as well as the ways the messages of the route experience are represented through the different communication channels. It is also of equal importance to explore in depth the ways the route experience is staged as well as identify the marketing tools used by the Routes of the Olive Tree. Finally, what difficulties may be faced and what challenges need to be considered regarding the aspects delineated above, for the route in exam, become another critical question to pose, as this is an area which has been given no particular attention in the literature. Therefore, this master thesis attempts to answer the following research questions:

- ***How does the Routes of the Olive Tree use experiences to market and differentiate itself?***
- ***What challenges and issues can be identified?***

2. METHODOLOGY

The approach followed in this research was qualitative, given the exploratory nature of the use of experiences in the context of cultural routes. Particularly, a case study method was chosen. The research design included the completion of a single holistic case study, using a triangulated approach to data collection involving observation, interviews, collection of texts and netnography. Following completion of the case study, pattern-matching technique was applied. While the study was progressing, the application of the hermeneutic spiral was constantly taken into consideration, as well as other considerations expressed in the literature over case study research.

2.1. Philosophy of Science

2.1.1. Ontology and epistemology

Guba (1990) defines a paradigm as a set of basic beliefs that guides our judgements, both during the research enquiry and the everyday life. Consequently, it is important, at the beginning of the research, to acknowledge our paradigmatic stance, as this greatly influences the ontological and epistemological basis of the research project (Ibid).

Ontology is the science concerned with the nature of the reality (Guba 1990; Lee 2012) and with the nature of social entities as objects of study (Bryman 2008). What is important to consider, given the aims of the research, is whether a reality that is objective, external and not dependent on the observer's point of view exists (Guba 1990; Marsh & Furlong 2002; Bryman 2008). In this regards, this research is considered to adopt a constructivist stance. Constructivism is a paradigmatic stance first introduced in the 1970s as a reformist paradigm to be used in qualitative research (Lee 2012). Not only constructivists claim that the study of social entities is epistemologically different from the natural sciences, as underlined by, for instance, the interpretivist position (Bryman 2008), but the very nature of reality is socially constructed, and not one but multiple realities exist, based on the peculiarities of the each observer's point of view (Guba 1990; Flick 2009). Consequently, reality does not exist as a static object, but as a dynamic process: according to Potter (1996:98, in Bryman 2008) the world is constructed "as people talk it, write it, and argue it".

While ontology is concerned with the nature of reality, epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge, namely "the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the

known (or knowable)" (Guba 1990). In coherence with what was expressed above about our ontological stance, we are in agreement with Marsh and Furlong (2002) in considering knowledge as never objective but always "affected by the social constructions of 'reality'" (2002:19) of the knower. Such epistemological position is referred as subjectivist in Guba (1990) and, under the constructivist paradigm, brings epistemology so much intertwined with the ontology that the border between the two is 'obsolete' (1990:26), as the known and the knower are "fused into a coherent whole" (Ibid). Knowledge is, therefore something created in our minds, through a peculiar construction of meaning (Guba 1990; Daly 2007).

Such paradigmatic premises have two main implications for our research: First, our "reality" is deeply influenced by our socially constructed point of view, and this consequently influences the nature of our enquiry: we present a reality in which concepts such as "experience", "differentiation" and "marketing" vary, in our case not only between the researchers and the participants, but between each researcher's personal point of view. This became clear throughout the research, as the different points of view brought us, in some occasions, to different judgements and conceptions of the data. As we will elaborate further, this was a major consideration that we had to take into account, which resulted in challenges but also opportunities. Second, as social reality is not a static object, but a dynamic, on-going construction made by social actors (Guba 1990; Bryman 2008) we acknowledge that the "reality" pictured in this research is considered as the peculiar outcome of contextualized dialogues between us, the participants, as well as the social constructions embedded in the material analyzed across the research.

Finally, we acknowledge that we actually formed the direction and results of the study, given that the knowledge depicted exist in our minds (Guba 1990) and we always include our values, preferences and meanings (Daly 2007; Bryman 2008). For instance, in order to answer how the Routes of the Olive Tree uses experiences to market and differentiate itself, we assessed how it stages the experiences on route, because it was implicit for us that there was an experience to stage, which could contribute in the route differentiation.

2.2. Case study as a research method

This master thesis seeks to provide insight into how the Routes of the Olive Tree uses experiences to market and differentiate itself, and what related challenges and issues can be detected. In order

to get such insight, the thesis utilizes a qualitative case study method.

Although there exists a lot of criticism about case studies as proper qualitative research methods (Abercrombie et al. 1994; Sarandakos 2005), they are being used as such within a large number of disciplines. A case study is considered as an empirical assessment of a phenomenon (e.g. an activity, an event, processes, groups or individuals) based on an extensive data collection (Merriam 1998; Creswell 2002; Stake 2000; Yin 2013), in a way that deep, comprehensive understanding of the situation is gained (Patton 1990; Creswell 2002; Flyvbjerg 2006). Among other features, case study research generally assumes that examining the context is integral to understanding the case (Miles and Huberman 1994; Merriam 1998; Flyvbjerg 2006; Baxter and Jack 2008; Yin 2013). This is in accordance with the importance that is given to the context in which, generally, qualitative enquiries take place (Fossey et al. 2002). For us, the context in which the Routes of the Olive Tree experience occurs has been considered as very important from the early stage of the enquiry design, in order to have a picture of the use of experiences to market and differentiate the cultural route in exam, and the related challenges and issues. In line with Flyvbjerg (2006) we consider the production of comprehensive, in-depth context-dependent knowledge as a strength, because such knowledge is of vital importance, particularly in social sciences. Indeed, our enquiry started from a perceived lack of knowledge about the use of experiences in marketing and differentiation contextualized on a cultural route.

There are confusing aspects in respect of case study as a method, one perhaps is that it necessitates the use of other social science research methods (Meier and Pugh, 1986). However, the possible use of multiple data sources from different methodologies is considered as another strength point, as it ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses (Baxter and Jack, 2008), which allows for multiple facets to be revealed and understood. The use of multiple data will be better addressed later in this part of the thesis.

2.2.1. When to use case study as a method

When establishing whether case study is the appropriate method for a research, a number of criteria need to be taken into account. First, the main research questions should be either exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory questions, as case studies are primarily qualitative and the purpose can be descriptive, exploratory and/or explanatory (Baxter and Jack 2008; Yin 2013). Second, the

researcher has little or no control over actual behavioral events (Yin 2013; Baxter and Jack 2008), and individuals are studied in their context (Bonoma 1985; Merriam 1998; Yin 2013). Third, the researcher is interested in a contemporary phenomenon as opposed to historical events (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Merriam 1998; Patton 2002; Yin 2013). Fourth, the researcher applies more than one data sources in the search of understanding (Bonoma 1985; Merriam 1998; Stake 1995; Yin 2013).

When considering all criteria mentioned above in respect of our enquiry, the reason behind the choice of case study method is evident. Our case is looking at *how* our cultural route in exam use experiences to market and differentiate itself and *what* are the challenges associated, in an area of a recognized theoretical lack, as explained in our introduction. In case the form of the research question was "who", "how many", "how much" or "where", other major research methods (e.g. survey, experiment, etc.) might have been more relevant (Yin 2013). Additionally, we aimed at using different data sources in order to observe the phenomenon under different angles, which as stated above is an aspect considered in case study research (Meier and Pugh 1986; Baxter and Jack 2008).

We similarly consider interesting the little or no degree of control over behavioral events that researchers must acknowledge (Baxter and Jack, 2008). As constructivists, we believed a high degree of control to be very much related with the positivist "manipulative" methodology, as so defined by Guba (1990) and thus, impossible to follow. Thus, we were aware that the outcomes of this research would have been a product of a contextualized interaction between us and the participants, in line with the nature of our constructivist methodology (Guba 1990). We understood that we could not control the environment or the behavioral events of the context, as we would have to place ourselves within the context being studied, in order to enhance our understanding (Flyvberg 2006).

We consider case study to be the most suitable method to employ, as it is an excellent opportunity to gain great insight into a case. Yet, we understand that pitfalls exist (Baxter and Jack, 2008), and acknowledge the weaknesses and limitations of case study research, and we consider them throughout the whole methodology section.

2.3. Case study design and preparation

Researchers continue planning and crafting studies of real-life situations with success while using the case study as a method of doing research (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 2013; Creswell 2002; Zucker 2009). As a consequence, many case study researchers have suggested strategies for conducting the research successfully. We have chosen to focus, particularly, on the methodologies proposed by Merriam (1988), Eisenhardt (1989), Yin (2013) and Stake (1995), because they present extensive and comprehensive methodological frameworks and consequently are the most used and discussed within the literature. All four demonstrate some general agreement about individual instructions and their approach is quite similar; however, some details vary. For instance, in Merriam (1988) Eisenhardt (1989) and Stake (1995) "theories are emergent" (Grünbaum 2007:80) and the initial phase of the study is the collection of empirical data. Therefore, the position of the theory in our research was in line with Yin (2013), because, in our case, it was developed before the data collection. As a consequence, the research design in Yin (2013) is structured from the start, though it can be altered to some extent, whereas in the above mentioned authors it is very flexible, emergent, and changing as the research goes on (Grünbaum 2007). As we were new in case study research, we found it useful to have a clear structure from the beginning, acknowledging the possibility of flexibility (Grünbaum 2007; Baxter and Jack 2008). Given these considerations, we found the approach of Yin (2013) relevant and, therefore, we developed our research design based mainly on the case study methodology he proposes. The reader can see a summary of each step we undertook in the table below. Each step will be further elaborated in this methodology section.

Case Study process				
1. Getting ready	**2. Design case study**	**3. Preparation**	**4. Data collection**	**5. Data Analysis**
Development of theory. Establishing the problem	Deciding whether to conduct a multiple or single case. Deciding the case and the unit(s) of analysis; holistic or embedded. Development of theoretical propositions	Training sessions for the specific case, development of a protocol	Considering data sources of evidence and basic principles i.e. using multiple sources, creating a case study database	Determine the appropriate analysis strategy and use appropriate analysis techniques, keep in mind three basic principles

Figure 1 Case study process

An aspect that generated some doubts with regards to refer to Yin (2013) as a backbone of our methodology was his paradigmatic stance, which in some authors (e.g. Grünbaum 2007, Brereton et. al. 2008) is considered as in line, to various extent, to a positivist position, and consequently,

the goal of case study research is by him considered "to explain, to test and modify existent theory. To generalize findings to other contexts" as if an objective reality exists (Grünbaum 2007:80). Consequently, we found our research goals to be in line with Merriam (1988) Eisenhardt (1989) and Stake (1995), whose definition of case study still aim at "create an understanding about the investigated phenomenon" (Grünbaum 2007:80) and are considered by the authors mentioned above closer to constructivism. On the other hand, Baxter and Jack (2008) consider Yin to be based on a constructivism paradigm, as he acknowledges the nature of reality as relative and socially constructed. Indeed, we already presented Yin's (2014) concept of case study as a method that can bring to an empirical contextualized, extensive, and possibly exploratory study, that can be concerned with "organizational and managerial processes" and related with the need "to understand complex social phenomena" (Ibid:4). Therefore, we consider the aims of Yin's case study framework to be generally in line with our research purposes.

2.3.1. Using theory in the design of the case

The use of theoretical concepts in order to select and design the case is, according to Yin (2013), what distinguishes the case study research from other qualitative methods, e.g. ethnography and grounded theory, as "typically, these related methods may deliberately avoid specifying any theoretical propositions at the outset of an enquiry" (2004:37). Consequently, theory played a central role in developing our research questions, selecting our case, refining our case study design and defining the relevant data to be collected. For example, a number of researchers (Hardy, 2003; Hayes and MacLeod, 2006; Lagiewski and Zekan, 2006) support that nowadays successful destinations need to 'sell' experiences for their customers if they want to be differentiated from their competitors. Similarly, studies that analyze how tourism organizations and destinations do, or should do that, underline the need to focus on specific tools (e.g. display tools, local community), or aspects (e.g. the message behind the experience, the staging). Therefore, we will proceed having some theoretical concepts in mind (e.g. "theming", "positive cues", "message" etc.) and will not discover from scratch what are the aspects to consider when enquiring how the Routes of the Olive Tree uses experiences to market and differentiate itself.

One of the consequences was the development of *propositions* (Yin 2013; Baxter and Jack 2008) which were mainly drawn on our theoretical framework. The researcher can have many propositions to guide the study, but each must have a distinct focus (Baxter and Jack 2008). A case

study that starts with propositions is less risky to implement than one having no propositions, given that propositions provide "surprisingly strong guidance in determining the data to collect and the strategies for analyzing the data" (Yin 2013:38) as well as in determining the "direction and scope of the study" (Baxter and Jack 2008:552). On the other hand, Baxter and Jack (2008) note that researchers that do not have sufficient experience for developing solid propositions, risk then to find themselves overwhelmed by too many and/or too weak propositions to be addressed in the data analysis. We opted for the use of propositions in our case study, acknowledging the associated risks. A table of our propositions developed basing on the template of Baxter and Jack (Ibid) can be found in the Appendix A.

2.3.2. Deductive theory

In line with what previously stated about the use of theory in Merriam (1988) Eisenhardt (1989), Stake (1995) and Yin (2013), and according to Bryman (2008), theory is seen either as something that "comes first and guides the process of gathering data" (2008:24) or as "the outcome of the research" (2008:26). In the first case theory is said to be deductive, in the second, inductive. Following this difference, the approach in use for this project is the deductive approach. We have a pre-understanding of reality that is heavily influenced by the existing theory, which, in turn, guided the process of gathering our data and the whole research design. Although our research design does not imply the formulation of hypothesis to test on the basis of the theory, according to Bryman (2008) this is not always the case with deductive approaches, and what is more important to consider is the place of the theory in the research: while deductive theory drives the research design, inductive theory, in fact, is the outcome of a research. In our case, drawing on our research questions, we chose the theoretical areas, concepts, and theories proposed in the theory section. As a consequence, we designed our research and gathered our data according to specific theories, in a specific way: this is particularly evident in our analysis of, for instance, the display tools implemented on the cultural route and the kind of language used on the informative material about the attractions. The areas we chose to focus on, the elements that we focus our participant observation on, the questions we chose to ask to our interviewed participants, derive for the most part from our theoretical framework.

However, much criticism exist in the literature over the use of deduction in social sciences: deduction is claimed not to produce new knowledge at all (Reichertz 2014), and is widely criticized

by qualitative researchers, who in turn support the use of induction, within social sciences (Brewer & Miller 2003). On the other hand, Bryman (2008) underlines how the border between the two is indistinct: in fact, deductive research often implies a degree of induction, and vice versa, with both stances involved throughout the research: in the end of a deductive research, a degree of induction is always existing, "as the researcher infers the implications of his or her findings for the theory that prompted the whole exercise" (2008: 24). Moreover, our research does not started entirely from deductive theories, but also from commonalities between cases and imaginative acts, a prior knowledge that influence even inductive research (Brewer & Miller 2003): prejudices, general knowledge, expectations and conventional information about experience economy and cultural routes heavily influenced the researchers even before assembling a theoretical framework. Finally, as we will explain later in this methodology section, we argue that, even though the final results of our thesis are not new theories drawn out of generalized data, this research still gives new, useful understanding about the topic through the production of context-dependent knowledge (Flyvberg 2006).

2.4. Designing Case Study

In the beginning, much time was allowed for preparatory readings. Preparatory readings included examples of case studies from previous case study researches, European Council's reports and publications over cultural routes as well as our theoretical framework, which helped us define our theoretical propositions. As a result, at this point we gained knowledge about the 29 European Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, including what later would have been chosen as our case study, the Routes of the Olive Tree. At this phase, a first attempt to establish preliminary contacts was also made with all the Cultural Routes.

2.4.1. Initial criteria

Deciding whether to do a single case study or a multiple case-study, is an important step to undertake. Following a multiple case study design was beyond the scope of this master thesis: Yin (2013) supports the idea that the decision to undertake multiple case studies cannot be taken slightly, as the conduct requires extensive resources and time, which were beyond the limits of this research. Since we undertook an exploratory case study, we chose to focus on a single case, in order to better understand the use of experiences a cultural route makes and to generate new understanding. Single case studies are often criticized due to fears about uniqueness surrounding

the case and a perceived lack of control, as only multiple cases are said to provide valid findings (Campbell and Stanley 1966; Abercrombie et al. 1984; Dogan and Pelassy 1990). On the contrary, Flyvbjerg (2006) supports the capacity of single case studies, to provide useful, in-depth context-dependent knowledge. Additionally, as Creswell (1998) argues, the more cases used, the less the depth expected to achieve. Gaining an in-depth understanding was, as already explained, an idea that highly guided our research, as our goal was to capture in depth as much data as possible within the location of one cultural route and its network.

As Yin (2002) points out, useful screening criteria include the willingness of key persons in the case to participate in the case study. We were rather aware of the case to be studied because of the 'special' access that we acquired. Having in mind that we would certainly like to investigate a European Cultural Route, we contacted a number of them, with the hope that they would be willing to help us with our research. The Routes of the Olive Tree in Greece was the organization that showed the highest will to cooperate and the best openness to receive us in their quarters in Kalamata. In relation with this last criterion, Bernard (1994) and Temple and Young (2004) point out how speaking the local language plays an important role in enriching the relationship with participants and strengthening the outcomes of observation. This motivated us to search for cases with a particular attention in Italy and Greece, given the role of the common nationality and language would have played in establishing meaningful contacts. Again, the Routes of the Olive Tree satisfied these criteria (willingness to cooperate, common nationality and language) better than other suitable routes (e.g. the Italian Phoenician Routes, which never replied to our requests) and therefore we decided to select it as our single case study.

In addition, among the five rationales that Yin (2013) proposes for choosing a single-case study (critical, extreme, common, revelatory or longitudinal) we considered the Routes of the Olive Tree to be a critical case, because it was judged to be mainly critical to our theoretical propositions about the use of experiences in marketing and differentiation. Since an attempt to describe the use of experiences to market and differentiate a cultural route has never been done before, one of the aims of our single case study was to provide a significant contribution to knowledge by confirming or challenging the existing theory (Yin 2013; Flyvberg 2006). Another, related criteria listed by Yin (2002) that guided us towards choosing the Routes of the Olive Tree included the likely richness of the available data, as well as preliminary evidence that the case had the situation that

we were seeking to study. We had a pre-understanding of the Routes of the Olive Tree as a critical case, likely rich of data, because of the preliminary evidence that we could collect, mainly from our contacts with the Routes of the Olive Tree, the websites of the European Institute for Cultural Routes, the website of the Routes of the Olive Tree, and from the study report on European Cultural Routes (Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011). Particularly, from the sources listed above, we could envision the Routes of the Olive Tree as a well-established route, with solid ties in the region (Ibid), and we were able to see the detailed maps of a number of itineraries on the website, with icons of different attractions. This greatly contributed in our preparation for the case study, as we will see later in this methodology. Other routes (e.g. the Francigena), while satisfying the other criteria, could not allow us to collect sufficient preliminary information about the criticality of the case, and of its supposedly richness of data.

2.4.2. Unit of analysis

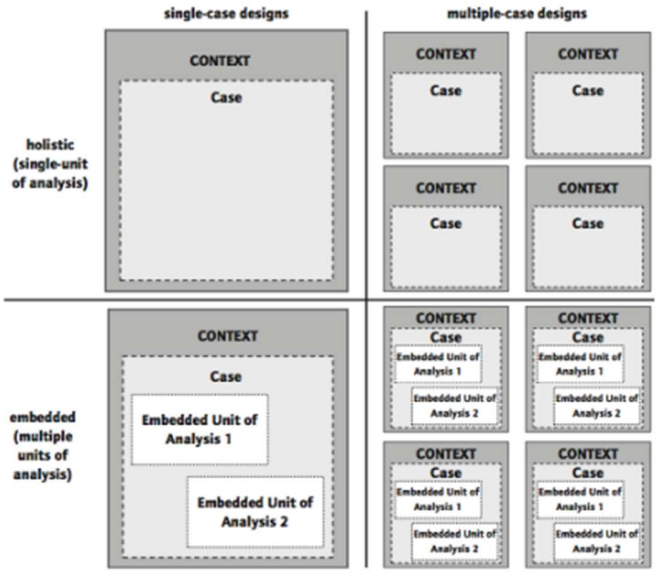


Figure 2 Basic types of design for case studies

The next step to undertake was to define our unit of analysis. The unit of analysis is practically the 'who' or the 'what' that is being analyzed (Merriam 1998; Creswell 2002; Yin 2013). For many authors, the unit of analysis is the case itself: in general, a contextualized phenomenon (Vaughan 1992; Patton 2002; Miles and Huberman 1994). Yin (2013), on the other hand, proposes a distinction within single case studies, between cases with one single unit of analysis (*holistic*) and cases with more units of analysis (*embedded*). In fact, even when the "case" is a single organization, the analysis might include outcomes that come from different sources within such organization, such as divisions, employed staff, partners or different funded projects, which would then be *embedded units of analysis* (Yin 2013, Baxter and Jack, 2008).

Yin (2013) argues that designing specific units of analysis is not compulsory in case study research and traditionally such distinction is generally not implemented. Yet, specifying the number of units

of analysis within a single case study may help in making the case "stronger and possibly easier to do" (Ibid:50). According to Baxter and Jack, (2008:550) the use of embedded units makes the analysis richer and will "serve to better illuminate the case".

The use of the term "Routes of the Olive Tree", often used to mean a cultural route (Khovanova-Rubicondo et. al 2011) can be misleading, as it can lead to the idea of the "Routes of the Olive Tree" as a single itinerary: therefore, some clarifications are needed. The "Routes of the Olive Tree" is also the name of a Cultural Foundation who currently manages different itineraries in Greece and abroad that, together, are considered as the Cultural Route of the Council of Europe "Routes of the Olive Tree". Our analysis includes outcomes about diverse partners, attractions and divisions of the Cultural Foundation, which we initially perceived as separate, subunits of analysis. As it can be seen in the figure, we tried to identify a set of subunits, such as the Cultural Foundation, the travel agency 'Trigilidas Travel' and KCVB (Kalamata Convention Bureau), as we intended our case to be an *embedded* case study. The lines that connect the embedded units with the main case aim at symbolizing the relationship that should always subsist, in the analysis, between each subunit and the case (Yin 2013).

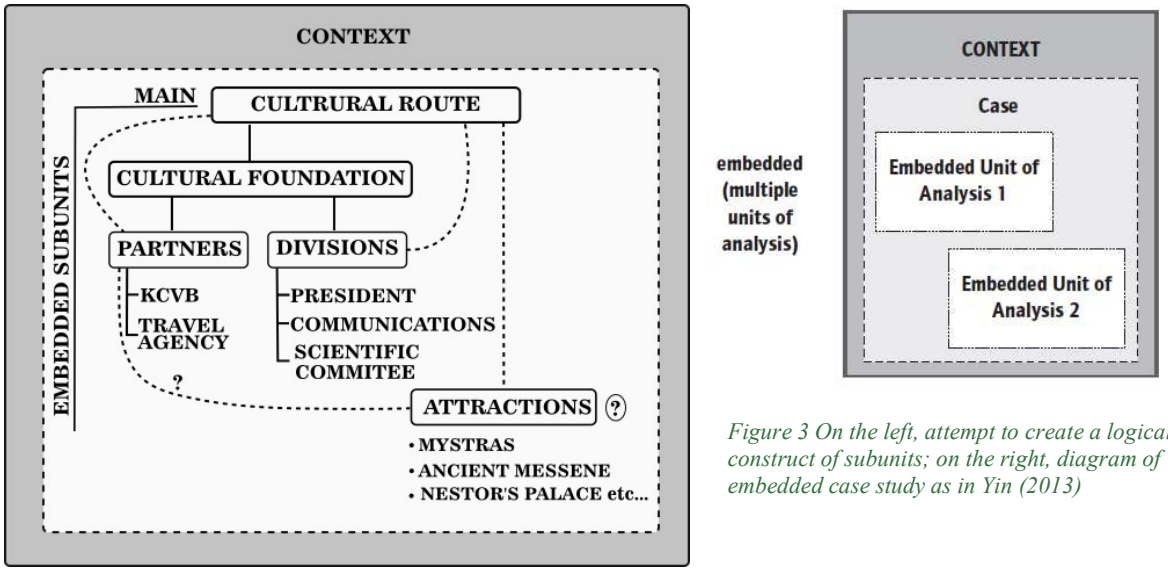


Figure 3 On the left, attempt to create a logical construct of subunits; on the right, diagram of embedded case study as in Yin (2013)

Yet, as noted by Grünbaum (2007), concrete guidelines in order to separate the "case" from the unit(s) of analysis do not exist in the literature or are contradictive. In particular, the author criticizes the aforementioned distinctions of Yin (2013) to be too vague. While designing the single case study, we personally experienced the difficulty of uncovering a consistent logic behind our

embedded units: the reader may see the interrogative dots put in one of our first attempts, which exemplify this difficulty. We certainly believe this to be related with the conceptual ambiguity mentioned by Grünbaum (2007) because we felt that we did not have sufficient guidelines to distinguish solid subunits, but also rerated with the very nature of cultural routes, described by Berti (2013:2) as complex, territorial "systems of systems". The complex nature of the Routes of the Olive Tree was, indeed, very difficult to grasp before the data collection took place, in a way that it allows the creation of a solid logic behind the division of the subunits and the relationships between them (Yin 2013).

When a clear logical distinction between subunits cannot be identified, Yin (2013) advocates for the use of a *holistic* design instead, which was the one eventually chosen for this research. In this case, the Cultural Route of the Council of Europe Routes of the Olive Tree was defined as our single unit of analysis. While on the field, we could personally verify the difficulty of establishing a solid embedded case study in advance. The Cultural Foundation, before conducting the fieldwork, had depicted to us a situation of partnership between them, the travel agency 'Trigilidas' and KCVB that did not correspond to what actually was found on the field. When we first contacted the Cultural Foundation via email, these subjects were clearly described as critical, "key persons" and "members" of the cultural route. On the other hand, our interviews depicted a very different situation, as it can be seen in the analysis, in which the partnership with the KCVB deteriorated in time. What is more, the travel agency 'Trigilidas' was in fact considered as a competitor organization. Although we still consider KCVB and the travel agency 'Trigilidas' very important sources of data in relation with our research questions, their nature as embedded subunits could not have been sufficiently assessed in the design of the case. In addition, the existence of Mr. and Mrs Skarpalezou as critical data sources for our analysis could only be realized, while of the field, an additional fact that contributes in explain how difficult it was to define each subunit in advance.

2.5. Preparation for the case study

At this phase, our main concern, in accordance with Yin (2013), was to prepare ourselves, at best of our capabilities, for the imminent data collection. Therefore, we collected other information about the context of our data collection from different sources, and we established further contacts with the Cultural Foundation in order to plan our schedule as far as possible. Training, which is a necessary step in doing case study research (Yin 2013), included several discussions between the

two of us. During the training sessions, theoretical issues that had led to the case study design, the main research questions as well as the case study methods were thoroughly discussed. In Figure 2, an example of these training sessions is displayed, when a discussion over the main theoretical concepts and authors took place with the aid of a white board.

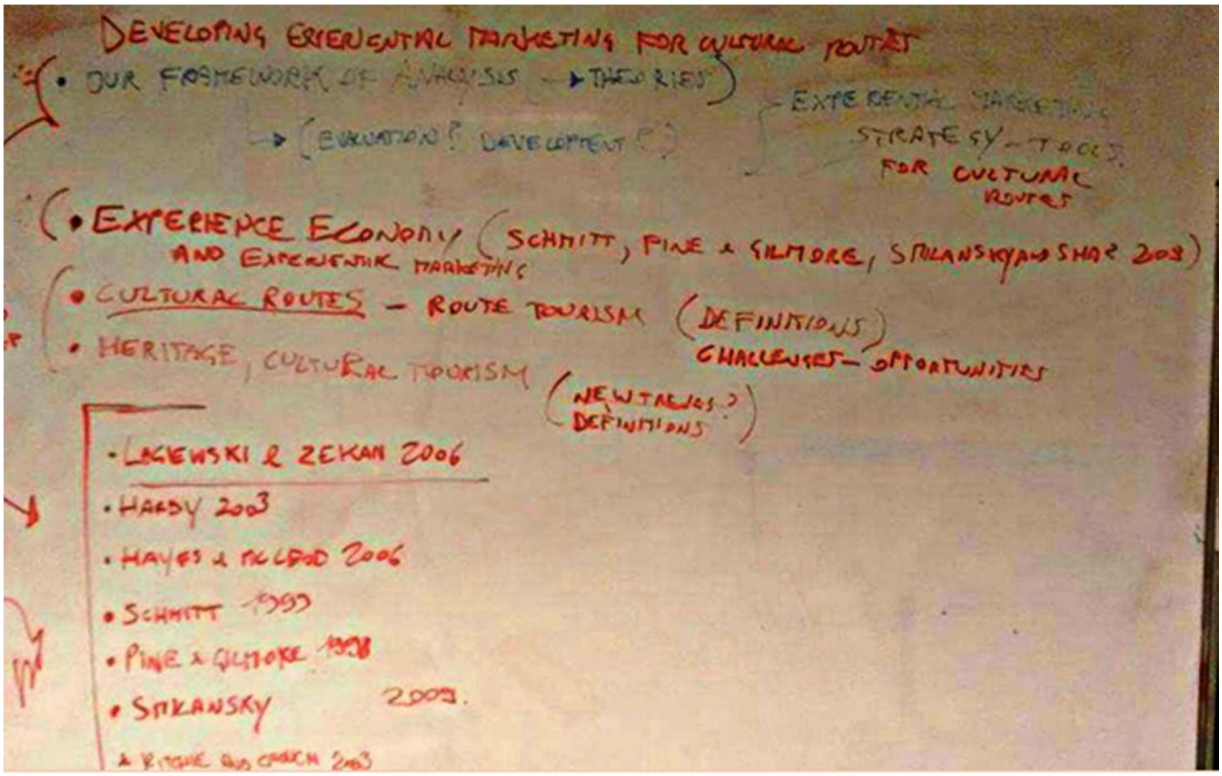


Figure 4 Example of training session

2.5.1. Developing a protocol

As part of our initial planning stage of our research, we decided to develop and make use of a case study protocol, as its use is recommended by Stake (1995) and Yin (2013) prior to data collection and analysis. According to Maimbo and Pervan (2005:1281), a Case Study Protocol is "a set of comprehensive guidelines that is an integral part of the case research design and contains the procedures for conducting the research, the research instrument itself, and the guidelines for data analysis". This "tool" is intended to both serve as frame of operation for the researcher and to increase the reliability of the research (Zucker 2009; Yin 2013). On the other hand, we acknowledge that we are not 'prisoners' of our report, as the possibility of changes in planning during data collection are a normal consequence of the little degree of control that we have over

the data collection environment (Yin 2013). Our case study was not conducted by one single researcher and the protocol we have developed helped by laying out specific guidelines and general rules to be followed for each stage of our research (Ibid). Despite the importance of case study protocols, very few templates exist in the literature, because of the protocol's unique nature, which must adapt to the specificity of the case study (Maimbo and Pervan 2005). Our case study protocol was inspired by Yin (2013) and contains the following sections:

a) **Overview of the case study,** including objectives, expected issues, relevant readings and theoretical background, and propositions: the general aim for us was to have a clear idea of the study's aims and directions, as a reference point during the field work.
b) **Data collection procedures,** including likely sources of data, field contacts, logistical notes and considerations: this section accounts for the lack of control of the field for the researcher, if compared to other research methods (Yin 2013) and all the relevant operational procedures and possible issues are outlined, including, schedules, modalities of accessing the data and resources.
c) **Data collection questions,** meaning the questions that the observer should always bear in mind during data collection: this is considered as "the heart of the protocol" (Yin 2013:89) and in our case it did not include questions to ask to the participants, but those questions that we were asking ourselves, that drove particular data collection activities. Associating each question with a likely source of evidence helped us to review our activity on the field, and to 'stay on track', as we already assessed the potential pitfall of 'getting lost' in the data, especially in holistic single case studies (Ibid, Baxter and Jack, 2008).

While the aforementioned sections constituted an initial template we have used in building our peculiar case study protocol, we were additionally influenced by Maimbo and Pervan (2005), if not for the structure, for some important information to include in the content). The actual case study protocol can be seen as our 'agenda' to guide us on the data collection (Yin 2013) and can be found in Appendix B.

2.5.2. Organize data gathering

Our first contact with the Cultural Foundation the Routes of the Olive Tree was done via telephone. After the Head of Coordination and Cultural Program showed special interest in cooperating with us, several phone calls followed in order to agree on a time period that we could conduct our

research on the field and make the necessary arrangements. Meetings were arranged with available key-persons working for the Routes of the Olive Tree, including the Head of Coordination herself, the President and Executive Director as well as the President of the Scientific Committee of the Routes of the Olive Tree, who lives and works in Athens, as well as with the head of KCVB (Kalamata Convention and Visitors Bureau) of the Messinian Chamber of Commerce. Despite the small number of participants, their contribution was considered to be able to provide multifaceted and rich information in relation with our research questions and the other methods implemented in our research, such as participant observation. On the other hand, back then, we acknowledged that this preliminary selection of participants could not be forecasted with a reliable degree of accuracy, because the people who happen to be there while conducting the fieldwork may not result in the best sources of data (Stake 1995). We agree with this opinion and, though we chose to make all arrangements in advance, yet we were aware that we might potentially encounter more people that could best help us understand the case. This eventuality occurred while on location, as, for instance, the Manager of Trigilidas Travel did not happen to be the source of data that we hypothesized at the beginning, while on the other hand we encountered volunteers and members of the local community who proved to be rich sources of data (e.g. Mr. Skarpalezos and the volunteer that accompanied us in Ancient Messene).

2.5.3. Database

In order to arrange and organize the data collected during our case study, we made use of a case study database (Yin 2013), which allowed us to store the data in a safe place, share the data collected and consult it when needed. According to Yin (2013), the possibility of sharing the database for further consultation increases the reliability of the research remarkably. Given what stated above, we decided that the best way for us to proceed was to use a Cloud service and create a digital folder, which could then be shared and updated by both of us using our electronic devices. During our data collection, we kept our protocol as well as our field notes and pictures in this folder, which was accessible all the time for consultation and modification from our smartphones, (that were constantly with us during the data collection) and from our laptops. The audio files, since they were extremely big and in Greek, were kept at the Greek researcher's private laptop. Furthermore, in order to safeguard from unexpected losses, we periodically saved the content of the cloud folder in our separate laptops. The content of that folder can be found in Appendix C, Appendix E and Appendix F.

2.6. Data collection

Our fieldwork took place in May 2016. During our 10-day trip to Greece, we spent the majority of the time in the region of Messenia, located in the south east of the Peloponnese, a geographic region in the south of Greece.

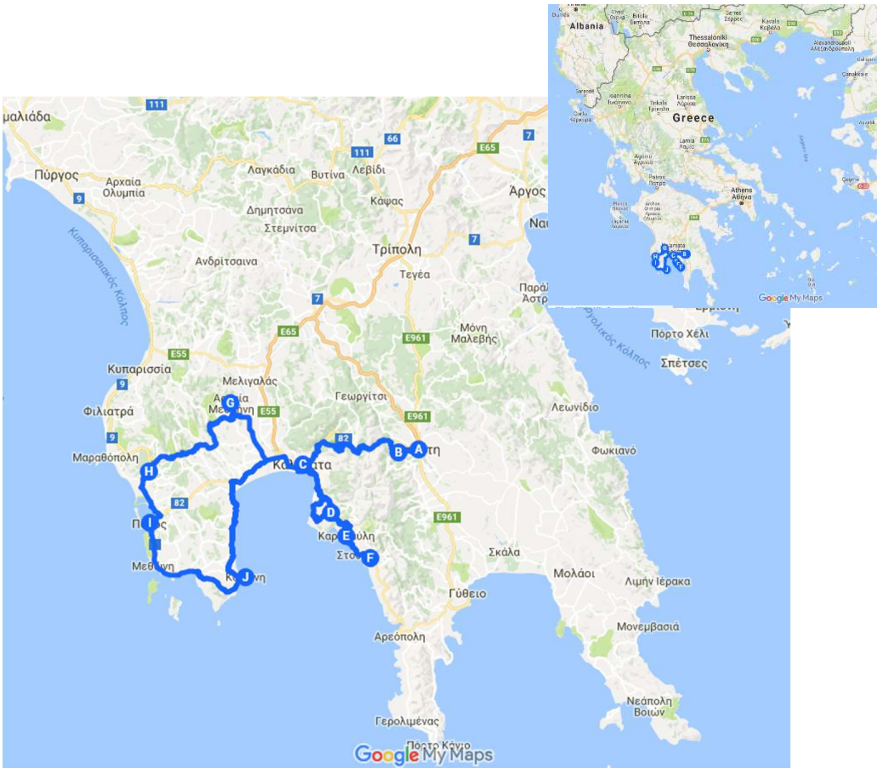


Figure 5 Routes of the Olive Tree - Short Itinerary in Greece

2.6.1. Participant observation

A very important source of data collection was participant observation. Creswell (2002: 200) defines participant observation as "an observational role adopted by researchers when they take part in activities in the setting they observe". This observational role requires engagement in activities at the site being studied, i.e., in our case, visiting attractions along the route, interacting with local community members, and with personnel affiliated with the Route of the Olive trees. Similarly, for DeWalt and DeWalt (2002), participant observation is the process that enables the researchers to learn about the activities being studied through observing and participating in those activities. Instead of using a questionnaire to study how the Routes of the Olive Tree uses experiences to market and differentiate itself, we went one step further and immersed ourselves in the environment of the cultural route, in order to provide a "written photograph" of the situation,

using our five senses (Erlandson et. al.1993). According to Yin (2013), because of the aforementioned characteristics, participant observation allows the researchers to gain a degree of access to the case impossible to access by using other techniques. Yet, as pointed out by Lichterman (2002), there is not a single, good way of doing participant observation, and specific guidelines to indicate what to look for and "what count as finding" (2002: 119).

The purpose of our research was the most important factor in determining what we should have observed in the first place, as also Merriam (1998:97) suggests: "Where to begin looking depends on the research question, but where to focus or stop action cannot be determined ahead of time". Having always in mind the already described protocol that we developed, as well as our theoretical propositions, we tried to focus on different types of activities, events, behaviors, signs and study what was happening on the field. We also tried to look for variations in the variety of viewpoints and contradictions as well as behaviors that could exemplify the theoretical purposes for the observation (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002), e.g. whether there is coherence of the theming of the experience along the route. Furthermore, the participants' insights guided sometimes our decisions about what to observe, e.g. specific detailed directions given by the Head of Communication as we were warned that there was no signage along the route and it might have been easy to lose our way. We also recognize the limited capacity of the protocol to guide our research before but also during the participant observation. In particular, our protocol did not limit our capacity to adapt to the situation and we fully acknowledged the little degree of control that we had while doing participant observation.

Our fieldwork involved activities such as "fitting in, active seeing, short-term memory, informal interviewing, recording detailed field notes, and, perhaps most importantly, patience" (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002:17). While doing our fieldwork, we used a checklist of elements to be recorded in field notes in order to structure our observations, based on Lichterman (2002) and Merriam's (1998): *physical setting, participants, activities and interactions, conversation, subtle factors* and *our own behavior*. We were constantly observing the physical environment, the surroundings of the setting and provided a written description of the context.

In relation to the aspect of participant observation that concerns conversations with participants, we are aware that, as Lichterman (2002) and Lofland (1971 in Fontana and Frey 1994) point out,

data collected in participant observation often come from unstructured interviews. We will discuss this form of interviewing later in this methodology section. We looked at other subtle factors, such as nonverbal communication (e.g. P2 using gestures while speaking), physical clues (e.g. EU informative material in the office; being a clue of message confusion) and what should happen that has not happened (e.g. local community member in Kardamyli discouraged our visit to the old soap factory). Furthermore, we tried to observe our own conversations in terms of content, who interacts with whom, who listens, our own behavior and how our role affects those who are observed.

Being aware that our presence will affect the behavior of the participants regardless of the relationship we form with them, we did not attempt to maintain a distance. On the contrary, we tried to establish trust and interact with them as much as possible, even though the degree of interaction for each us was different, as in many occasions one researcher was not able to verbally interact due to language barriers. This imply a series of considerations which affected many of our interviews as well, and it will be addressed in the related section later in this methodology. Still, we attempted to achieve a high degree of interaction, in accordance with our constructivist stance, in particular our epistemology and methodology, as explained by Guba (1990): as, epistemologically, "findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction" between the researchers and the inquired (1990:27), the researcher attempt, methodologically, at "depicting individual constructions as accurately as possible" (Ibid). In all of the meetings that we conducted, we considered these implications, and, following Merriam (1998), we took extensive notes and collected data around those interactions.

Field notes were the primary way of capturing the data that was collected from participant observations. Our field notes include informal conversations with participants, records of activities and notes that were kept on a daily basis. Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) describe field notes as both data and analysis, because they provide an accurate description of what is observed and are the product of the observation process. As they note, observations are not data unless they are recorded into field notes.

Including participant observation in our research familiarized us with the setting of the route and facilitated the access to data sources which would not have been possible to reach in another way:

for instance, useful data from Mr. and Ms. Skarpalezos and the volunteer in Ancient Messene could be obtained only as a consequence of our participant observation. Bernard (1994) states that "the most important thing you can do to stop being a freak is to speak the language of the people you're studying—and speak it well" (1994:145). In our case, at least one of the researchers could speak the native Greek language and this helped deepening our participant observation.

Despite the capacity of participant observation to provide researchers with otherwise not accessible data, there are a series of challenges and pitfalls, which we experienced personally while engaging in this method. A common critique to participant observation is the lack of possibility to generalize the findings, given the peculiarities of the context in which the observation take place (Lichterman 2002). As this issue is well acknowledged for single case studies in general, as something that affect the whole research, we will address it in the Quality of Research. Another related issue in particular with physically disperse case studies, as "the participant-observer may find it difficult to be at the right place at the right time" (Yin 2013:117). Our case study, being related with the route experience of the Routes of the Olive Tree, implies this issue, which we tried to address with a careful planning, basing on our protocol. Although our attempts were successful in many occasions, as were able to reach attractions such as the Olive mill and the soap factory in Kardamyli by scooter, as planned in our protocol, in other occasions it was not possible to reach important attractions (such as Nestor's palace and Koroni) due to the road conditions.

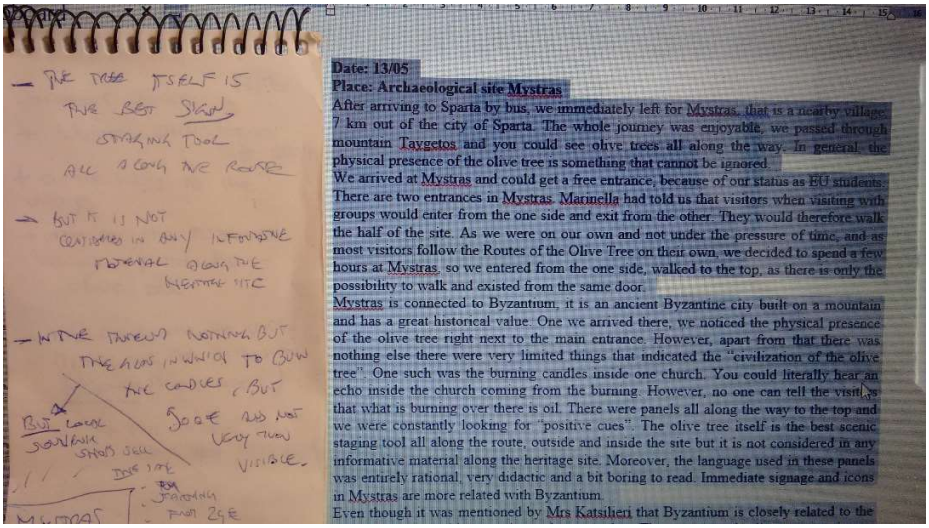
Perhaps the issue that we faced the most, and that must be considered throughout all our data collection and analysis, was the tendency for us to become advocates or politically, emotionally and personally biased towards the Routes of the Olive Tree (Yin (2013). This is due to the fact that the Routes of the Olive Tree, as already mentioned, engaged in a deep and valuable relation of thrust with us. We already addressed how the quality of such relation has been seen, at the moment of our research design, as a valued criterion (Yin 2002) that guided us towards choosing this route as a case study. This relationship, indeed, in many occasions helped to uncover important data, such as confidential information about the Route of the Olive Trees' relationship with partners, planned events and initiatives, and issues particularly important for assessing our research questions.

Yet, at the same time, we recognize that this brought us very close to the participants' point of

view towards the social and natural context in which the cultural route is set, provoking a degree of bias: Yin (2013) strongly argues against this eventuality, as something that may bring us to "roles contrary to the interests of good social science practice" (2013: 117) and affect credibility. On the other hand, as noted by Musante and DeWalt (2010), all research is intrinsically biased in this sense: what is important to consider, for the researchers, is then *how* the research is biased, which must bring them to a careful, and reflexive assessment of the biases during and after the participant observation. Additionally, as Lichterman (2002) note, particularly in theory-driven participant observation it is unavoidable, for us, to bring "tacit, if not explicit, concepts to even our first observations in the field", as observations "are never completely raw, innocent of concepts" (2002: 123). Again, it becomes critical, other than trying to eliminate them, to make our personal presuppositions as explicit as possible on the field (Ibid). We considered what argued by Lichterman (2002) and Musante and DeWalt (2010) to be in line with our paradigmatic stance, as, being constructivists, we do believe in the necessity of depicting the observers' subjectivism for the sake of the research (Guba 1990; Drury and Stott 2001). Therefore, we attempted to constantly clarify potential and existing biases towards our case study, as well as how pre-existing concepts influenced our participant observation and the collection of field notes.

2.6.1.1. Expanding field notes

Mack et al. (2005) and Bogdan and Biklen (1982) underline how important it is, for the researchers, to code the field notes taken while doing participant observation as soon as possible, and as detailed as possible, in order to complete the notes with what was not available to note during the observation (avoiding this way memory fading). We were aware of this possibility, and made our best to code the field notes on our papers into our laptops at the end of each day spent doing participant observation. According to Mack et al. (2005), an immediate code should be focused on making sentences understandable for the reader(s). A complete, expanded field note should take the form of an extended and detailed narrative, ready to be used for the analysis (Ibid). An example of the expansion procedure implemented by us is shown below, which is drawn on Mack et al. (2005) and Bogdan and Biklen (1982). Particularly, while taking notes, we made sufficiently clear the context in which the note was taken, and, finally, once initial notes were expanded, they constituted an initial experience record: as the research proceeded, new experiences altered our interpretation of the old experiences. Therefore, we constantly reviewed our expanded notes, as new insights and details were added each time.



Date: 13/05
Place: Archaeological site Mystras
After arriving to Sparta by bus, we immediately left for Mystras, that is a nearby village, 7 km out of the city of Sparta. The whole journey was enjoyable, we passed through mountain Taygetos and you could see olive trees all along the way. In general, the physical presence of the olive tree is something that cannot be ignored.
We arrived at Mystras and could get a free entrance, because of our status as EU students. There are two entrances in Mystras. Marinella had told us that visitors when visiting with groups would enter from the one side and exit from the other. They would therefore walk the half of the site. As we were on our own and not under the pressure of time, and as most visitors follow the Routes of the Olive Tree on their own, we decided to spend a few hours at Mystras, so we entered from the one side, walked to the top, as there is only the possibility to walk and existed from the same door.
Mystras is connected to Byzantium, it is an ancient Byzantine city built on a mountain and has a great historical value. One we arrived there, we noticed the physical presence of the olive tree right next to the main entrance. However, apart from that there was nothing else there were very limited things that indicated the "civilization of the olive tree". One such was the burning candles inside one church. You could literally hear an echo inside the church coming from the burning. However, no one can tell the visitors that what is burning over there is oil. There were panels all along the way to the top and we were constantly looking for "positive cues". The olive tree itself is the best scenic staging tool all along the route, outside and inside the site but it is not considered in any informative material along the heritage site. Moreover, the language used in these panels was entirely rational, very didactic and a bit boring to read. Immediate signage and icons in Mystras are more related with Byzantium.
Even though it was mentioned by Mrs Katsiheri that Byzantium is closely related to the

Figure 6 Example of expanding field notes

2.6.1.2. Collecting pictures during participant observation

As the reader can see in our analysis, we made use of pictures to better exemplify concepts expressed in our detailed narrative. These pictures were taken using mobile phones during the participant observation and, whereas this may seem a logical step to enhance the narrative's quality, some considerations need to be specified. The use of multimedia material during participant observation has been acknowledged in the literature, as pictures and videos are considered as an important instrument for data collection (Kanstrup 2002). It has been argued, indeed, that collecting pictures can be even considered as a standalone method of research (Collier and Colier 1986). However, a potential pitfall evidenced by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) is that an overemphasis on photography can distort the definition of the field by focusing data collection just on what can be captured by a camera. In our case, pictures have been considered only as an additional contribute to our impressions and interactions, and therefore they can be considered as part of our participant observation (Mack et al. 2005; Kanstrup 2002; Harper 1987). As it was for our personal notes, our theoretical propositions guided us in deciding what to capture with our photo cameras and why (Becker 1974; Harper 1987).

It has been argued that an interesting aspect of pictures, in comparison with written notes, is that they leave great space for open interpretation: different people can see different thing in the same picture, and the picture can provide a frame rich of visual data that can be repeatedly analyzed and discussed (Collier and Colier 1986; Kanstrup 2002). Pictures in our analysis are always related to a specific narrative of our expanded notes: therefore, the narrative contained in our personal notes

should be considered, at least, as the guide, for the reader, to interpret the pictures put in particular parts of the analysis. On the other hand, we acknowledge the possibility that our pictures can be open for further use and interpretation (Ibid). Additionally, we made use of the possibility to examine the pictures several times during our data collection and analysis, as part of our collaborative analysis (which will be described in the end of this thesis). This enabled the researchers to discuss the pictures and opened the research to new interpretations, as described by Kanstrup (2002), which influenced the content of the analysis.

A potential pitfall recognized in taking pictures is the lack of discreteness, compared with written notes. As specified by Kanstrup (2002), being an observer with a camera pointing at people can be potentially disruptive, as it can significally alter the social environment in which participant observation take place (Ibid; Harper 1987). The camera make participants very aware of the fact that they are being observed and this alter their behavior. The consequence is that we had to be moderate and careful in collecting pictures (Ibid). However, the reader may see that pictures have been used, in our research, mainly for static objects and elements of landscape. On the other hand, in one case one of we took a picture where one of us was involved in an interaction with Mr. Skarpalezos. The researcher who took the picture made sure the picture was taken discretely, in a situation in which the potential collection of pictures was agreed in advance with Mr. Skarpalezos (Mack et al. (2005).

2.6.2. Interviews

The interview is considered as the most commonly used and prominent method of data collection in qualitative research (Bryman 2008), athough Kvale (1994) advices against its lack of reliability, formalization and generalization. Amongst the numerous definitions of the term, the one more suitable for the sake of this research, which also influenced the use of the interviews along the research design, is the one of Fontana and Frey (1994), for whom interviewing means interacting: we consider interacting with the participants, both the ones assessed in advance in our protocol and the additional ones encountered on the field, to be important, as it is "one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings" (1994:361). A major fact to consider is that such interacting has been different between us, as in the majority of cases the language in use was the native of the participants, Greek: as this certainly enriched the information acquired (Bernam 1994) in these cases the Greek researcher was also playing the role of the mediator of the interaction between the Italian researcher and the participants, which

comports some issues that will be described later in this section. However, English was used in two cases, the interview conducted with the manager of the travel agency Trigilidas, and the head of KCVB.

As it can be seen in the analysis, much useful data has been collected by interviewing, that gave us vital understanding about how the Routes of the Olive Tree uses experiences to market and differentiate itself, and it greatly contributed in detecting issues and challenges that would not have emerged by using only participant observation or collections of texts. Knox and Burkard (2009) claim that the interviewer-participant relationship is the most critical aspect of a qualitative research project. As also argued by Fontana and Frey (1994), to have a comfortable, trustworthy relationship with the participant eases the conversation, facilitating the collection of data. We could personally experience this during our interactions with the personnel of the Cultural Foundation, which, in line with what stated by the aforementioned authors, provided a particularly rich data, if compared with our interactions with the travel agency Trigilidas or KCVB. All the interviews were face-to-face, to grant an ulterior degree of flexibility and adaptation for the interviewer (Goeldner and Ritchie 2003), as, given our lack of prior knowledge about the specific context in exam, we believed flexibility and adaptation to be of outmost importance.

Particularly, interviewing methods used in this project are semi-structured and unstructured interviews. According to Bryman (2008), semi-structured and unstructured interviews are the most used within qualitative research, to the point that "researchers sometimes employ the term 'qualitative interview' to encapsulate these two types of interview" (2008:469). On the other hand, as noted by Fontana and Frey (1994:363), structured interviews "imply all respondents receive the same set of questions, asked in the same order or sequence, by an interviewer who has been trained to treat every interview situation in a like manner". This also implies very little flexibility is given to the interaction. We considered our research to be inconsistent with the premises delineated above, due to the exploratory nature of our study and the lack of knowledge about the interview situation prior to meeting our participants.

Semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, give flexibility to raise extra questions (Bryman 2008; Bernard and Ryan 2010), as the interview is open-ended and follows an "interview guide", which contains a list of questions and topics that need to be covered during the interview (Spradley

1979; Bryman 2008). Our guide was developed based on what discussed in the phase of preparation of our case study, in an attempt to cover all areas of interest, following our theoretical propositions.

In some cases, when speaking to the personnel of the Cultural Foundation, we used in-depth interviews, whose collection is a "qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews" (Boyce and Nyale 2006:3). In-depth interviews were useful because they provided us with detailed information about our participants' thoughts, behaviors, insight into certain occurrences, they helped us explore new issues in depth (e.g. challenges related to the use of experiences) and they also provided context to other data (Yin 2013; Boyce and Nyale 2006). For example, conversations with P2, which took place over an extended period of time, sometimes lasted 5 hours, however, this offered a more complete picture of the past and current situation of the Cultural Route. Furthermore, P2 was the one who suggested us to visit Skarpalezos Olive Mill and brought us in touch with the owners of the Mill and with the volunteer of the Routes of the Olive Tree in Ancient Messene. However, there are a few limitations to consider, such as the facts that the conversations were time-intensive, we were prone to bias and our results were not generalizable (Boyce and Nyale 2006). However, we will discuss the issue of bias and generalization in our Quality of Research.

Unstructured interviews allow a higher degree of freedom for the researcher, who uses, at most, a summary to deal with a certain range of topics. As pointed out by Bryman (2008:471) "there may be just a single question that the interviewer asks, and the interviewee is then allowed to respond freely, with the interviewer simply responding to points that seem worthy of being followed up". Often this kind of interview is very similar to a conversation (Burgess 1984, in Bryman 2008) and, as Lofland (1971, in Fontana and Frey 1994) points out, data collected in participant observation often come from unstructured interviews. This was the case in our research, and much data (for instance from our interaction with the volunteer in Ancient Messene, and Mr. Skarpalezos) came in the form of unstructured interviews gathered during the participant observation. The possibility of unstructured interviews, therefore, was acknowledged by us and incorporated as part of our participant observation.

Despite the high degree of freedom allowed in semi-structured and unstructured interviews

mentioned above, we attempted to exercise a degree of control for our interview, letting the interviewees talk and develop their thoughts, trying at the same time to avoid them to speak about totally unrelated topics (Bryman 2008; Flick 2009). For example, in some cases, a somewhat long elaboration of an unrelated topic was interrupted by the interviewer by switching the topic. This happened, for instance, while interviewing the president of the Cultural foundation, who in some occasions was elaborating on various projects implemented by the foundation. The interviewer, consequently, intervened by asking the participant to elaborate in relation with the route experience.

2.6.2.1. Translation and transcription

Transcription is, according to Bailey (2008), an important first step in data analysis. Despite the fact that the procedure of transcription is considered as very time consuming (Bryman 2008), the Greek researcher translated all extensive structured interviews into the English language. Translation, as defined in the literature, is not only the transcribing of text from a source language into a target language but also it is the interpretation of cultural meaning and cultural concepts a specific language carries (Temple and Young 2004; Filep 2009). Additionally, as Bailey (2008:127) argues, transforming recorded conversations into textual material "requires reduction, interpretation and representation to make the written text readable and meaningful". Hereby we present an example from our experience:

"Είναι δηλαδή, ένα, μια πρόταση, πως να το πω, μια ψευτοπρόταση, μια πρόταση πειραγμένη"

The word for word translation of this statement would sound like this:

"Is like a a sentence, how to tell, a psedo-sentence, a sentence tweaked".

As obviously seen, a literal translation can reduce the readability of the text and, therefore, there is the need for interpretation, reduction and representation. 'Free' translation of the interviewee's text was reasonable (Filep 2009) in order to make it meaningful. The final result was: "It is like, how to call it, a pseudo-offer. A modified offer". A very exemplary 'free' translation here is the word "pseudo". Since not only the Greek language but also the Greek 'culture' had to be interpreted and translated, instead of using a word such as 'fake' for 'ψευδό', it was concluded that the prefix 'pseudo' (which is a Greek prefix) should remain, as in the researcher's opinion the

nuance of such prefix is stronger, in Greek, than the English 'fake'. The other offer which the participant is talking about is not just fake, it is false, fraudulent and worthless.

Further difficulties may occur with the use of proverbs, jokes, ironic or sarcastic statements and idiomatic expressions (Filep 2009). Consider the following examples of the translation activity:

- They do not put their hands in their pockets (Greek idiomatic expression=they do not give any funding)
- This is what we call in Greece "small village, bad village".

The last example illustrates a typical Greek proverb. The narration of it is made by one of the participants to humoristically explain that conflicts always exist, particularly in small villages. Translation is a challenging task and, since many words and phrases that exist in one language do not have an exact equivalent in another (Filep 2009), the nature of meanings across languages can be argued to be problematic. Therefore, the risk of one getting "lost – not in, but by – translation" (Filep 2009: 69) exists.

More issues may arise if the data is in a different language from the language in which the findings are analyzed. As this research is conducted by two researchers, there are certain methodological and epistemological challenges that arise from recognition that people using different languages may construct different ways of seeing social life (Temple and Young 2004). Such implications and consequences are noted and acknowledged by both. Considering that the formation of knowledge is an active social construction and since only the Greek researcher was involved in the conduction of the (Greek) interviews, we acknowledge that the power relationships were not the same for the two of us. Therefore, this also coincides with our epistemological stance and we recognize that translation can be highly problematic in this case, as "the early 'domestication' of research into written English may mean that the ties between language and identity/culture are cut to the disadvantage of non-English speakers" (Temple and Young 2004:174). It was indeed the case that the Italian researcher who could not speak the dominant language while doing fieldwork in Greece and became dependent on his Greek counterpart. He had to entirely rely on the translations of the Greek researcher, as the contextual translations and the transcripts were not

neutral records of events, but reflected her interpretations of data (Bailey 2008). Therefore, relying on interpreters (e.g. Italian) holds the risk of an "interpreter version", because translators (e.g. Greek) "bring their own assumptions and concerns to the interview and the research process" (Temple 2002:11), resulting in misunderstandings.

However, the fact that the Greek researcher was fluent in the language of our field offers a number of opportunities that are not open to other researchers in cross language research (Temple and Young, 2004; Bernard 1994). Considering that from the beginning of the research process we were aware of the challenges stated above, we very much embraced the need for clarification and specification among us. In fact, it is stated by Temple and Young (2004:168) that the researcher-translator role offers the other researcher "significant opportunities for close attention to cross cultural meanings and interpretations and potentially brings the researcher up close to the problems of meaning equivalence within the research process". In the course of the research process, for example, the Greek researcher sometimes used her experience of translating to discuss points in the transcripts where she had to think about meaning (e.g. idiomatic sentences). This activity of the discussion of the translation processes can act as a check to the validity of interpretations, as also argued by Young and Ackerman (2001). Although we do not assume that the final transcripts are neither fully accurate neither real (as one single reality does not exist), we accept all above implications as inherent in the process of transcribing and we still attempt to make the final result representative of the source. We considered to share the transcripts with those participants able to, at least, understand written English, as this could also contribute in raising the validity of the transcript (Mero-Jaffe 2011) but we judged such strategy to raise issues that we preferred to avoid: in general with regard to transcription, research indicates that participants find it difficult to read transcripts, as, despite the accuracy of the transcription, they find the content uncoherent or badly phrased (Ibid). In line with Hagens et al. (2009), we believe that the disadvantages would overcome the advantages. Therefore, in order to raise the validity of the translation (and thus of the whole research), the translator discussed with the other researcher, and other bilingual collaborators, the interpretation of terms which implied a degree of ambiguity (Birbili 2000) such as the examples provided above.

2.6.3. Collection of texts

During our fieldwork, we collected a number of texts, which we used later on in order to support our analysis about the conveyance of the message and the coherence of the theme of the Routes of the Olive Tree. Text is used in this master thesis broadly as "anything that generates meaning through signifying practices" (Edelheim 2007:6) and therefore, we consider that not only verbal but also non-verbal texts (e.g. pictures) that are filled with narrative, can be analyzed in terms of the messages they communicate (Jenkins 2003; Hackley 2003; Edelheim 2007). During our fieldwork, we collected:

- *informative material,* which are given or sent to visitors by the Cultural Foundation. They contain practical information about the Cultural Route, detailed descriptions of the attractions, general information about the region of Messenia and information about the Mediterranean diet, gastronomy and traditional products
- *brochures*, which varied from a small booklet to a foldable leaflet, were collected from different sites and attractions that we personally visited (Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive Oil, Mystras, Olive Mill Skarpalezos, Ancient Messene) as well as from the two visitor centers (KCVB and the tourist information office of the municipality of Kalamata)
- photographs of *informative panels* found in different archeological sites and museums along the Cultural Route
- *posters* that are designed for the long cultural routes. They are distributed to the public and they contain texts relevant to the theme and the aims of the Cultural route

In order to evaluate, on the one hand the structural elements (descriptions of the attractions, stories about the olive tree, maps, visual material) in relation to the key experience-design principles (e.g. theming of the experience, usage of language, visual devices, storytelling and use of positive cues) and, on the other, to examine the coherence of the messages sent to visitors, we tried to understand the meanings expressed in the texts and we used semiotic analysis to "investigate the content and composition of photographs and how they communicate through signs and symbols various messages about the places they depict' (Jenkins 2003:314). According to Maasik and Solomon (1994) a written text, a picture, even a shirt and a haircut -anything at all- can be taken as a sign, as a message to be decoded and analyzed to discover its meaning. For example, reading this methodology section is an act of decoding (words are signs that must be interpreted), but so is figuring out what your colleague means by wearing a particular shirt (Ibid). Consequently, in the

texts that we collected, we examined both the content (comparing similar and contrasting contexts) and the appearance (comparing different styles) and the aim was to understand and interpret the meanings and the interaction of signs.

However, since meanings should be understood as cultural constructions (Hackley 2003), we completely acknowledge that each reader has their own understanding of these signs depending on their own social experiences and that their meaning is interpreted in terms of cultural codes that we have to learn in order to make sense of the signs around us (Ibid). Therefore, as constructivists, we consider the texts to be always viewed as polysemic constructs with multiple meanings (Hayes and MacLeod, 2006; Hackley 2003), which means that "there are always several equally valid ways of interpreting any sign" (Edelheim 2007:10). Therefore, our interpretations should not be read as verified 'truths', but as suggestions of meaning, which in our case is deeply influenced by our deductive theory. For example, we argue that the texts about the archeological site of Ancient Messene are not relevant to the theme of the Cultural Route (because, among various factors, we visited the place and talked with a volunteer of the Cultural Route), while another reader can argue the opposite, due to the fact that there are olive trees included in almost every picture of that 17-page booklet (which we consider as casual). Therefore, in our opinion, the meaning each reader gives to a text depends on his/her point of view.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that this master thesis analyses the texts as whole entities, because the conscious juxtaposition of different texts has created a text that has its own logic (Edelheim 2007:8). Due to the big amount of texts that we collected, we could not include all of them in the analysis. However, we chose to provide a number of examples, by extracting certain words, sentences and abstracts, having in mind the text as a whole.

2.6.4. Netnography

Netnography, drawing together the terms 'internet' and 'ethnography', is defined as a method specifically designed to study cultures and communities online (Bowler 2010). However, in the case of netnography participant observation of online communities follows two main strategies: a completely non-intrusive one, where the researcher limits himself to observing the interactions of the online communities and websites by lurking (Bruckman 2006) and a participatory one, where the researcher interacts with the online community members (Walstrom 2004). Therefore,

netnography can be far less intrusive than traditional ethnography, as the online researchers can gather a vast amount of data without making their presence visible to members (Beaulieu 2004; Kozinets 2010).

Although both Beaulieu (2004) and Kozinets (2010, 2014) emphasize the importance of engagement and participation in online communities, in our case, such non-participative activity was considered appropriate. We were not interested in the experience of participating in an online field site and socializing online, but we rather limited ourselves in identifying the different kinds of relevant social data that were available (textual, visual and audiovisual) that reflected the key experience-design principles (e.g. identify opportunities for interaction and inter(net)activity). Therefore, only 'lurking', a form of online reconnaissance, (Kozinets et al. 2014:9) was considered in our case.

Then, we made our 'cultural entrée', which is the first step in the process (Kozinets et al. 2014) by using a search engine (Google), which facilitated the choice of our field sites. From the general types of data available for collection in netnography, we chose to directly collect archival data, which, according to Kozinets et al. (2014) comprise anything we could gather from the internet that was not a product of our involvement to create or prompt the creation of data. We tried to deepen our knowledge about the Routes of the Olive Tree and we followed a similar method for understanding the meaning of the various signs as in the collection of texts. From the perspective of data collection, we captured our participation in screen captures and used them in the analysis.

We acknowledge that there is normally a more rigorous and disciplined approach to netnography and that our research can be criticized to be fairly basic due to our purely observational netnographic research. However, since the use of internet and social media is an effective addition in support of our investigation, we claim our data to still provide an interesting insight and help answer our research questions.

2.7. Data analysis

2.7.1. Triangulation

Conducting a case study research using a single source of data is certainly possible, yet it is not usually recommended, as one of the major strength of case study research is its ability to maximize the outcomes of using multiple sources of data through data triangulation (Yin 2013; Patton 2002; Denzin 1978; Nøkleby 2011). According to Yin (2013), by conducting a triangulation of data,

findings are more convincing, conclusion is more accurate, and, in general, the quality of the case study is rated higher. On the other hand, Nøkleby (2011) argue that the sole use of triangulation does not necessarily bring on an improved quality of research, as this depends on its scopes and implementation.

According to what stated above, triangulation is a particularly important concept in our case study research: its function is to reveal the understanding of the Routes of the Olive Tree from "different aspects of empirical reality" (Denzin, 1978) and is used as a tool to support our own constructions and guard against the accusation that our findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator's biases. Both Denzin (1978), Yin (2013) and Patton (2002) identify four types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation. In our master thesis we make use of all types, as described by Nøkleby (2011) and Denzin (1978).

Data triangulation involves analyzing several sets of data, from different times, places or people, in order to extend the comprehension of the phenomena, by using the same method (Nøkleby 2011). By using multiple sources of data we intend to attain the richest possible understanding of the case. In this thesis, in particular, *aggregate analysis* has been implemented (Denzin 1978), a situation in which the comparisons are made between separate individuals (Nøkleby 2011). For instance, comparing the perspectives of the different people working for the Routes of the Olive Tree was useful in cross-checking the consistency of information. In our analysis the reader can see different examples of this triangulation, e.g. when analyzing the areas of experience, the thematization and the role of the local community in the route experience.

Investigator triangulation is also present, considering the fact that we are two different researchers who review the findings. According to Nøkleby (2011), multiple researchers perceive, detect and note different things, being consequently able to discuss the findings among themselves, supporting and contrasting each other. While this is intended to partly solve the “problem” of the individual researcher as a subjective observer (Nøkleby 2011; Denzin 1978), a certainly not idyllic situation from a positivist perspective (Guba 1990; Bryman 2008), we already argued that, as constructivists, we do not believe objectivity to be possible. On the other hand, the presence of two different researchers is considered as a strength (Cornish et al. 2013), as it contributes to the

research by producing an integrated result which benefits from our diverse perspectives (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006) (see Collaborative analysis in Quality of Research). Finally, we acknowledge that our understanding of the field is not balanced, as for much of the data (especially transcripts and interactions during the participant observation) the Italian researcher had to heavily rely on the interpretations of the other. We already elaborated this point previously, in "translation and transcription".

Theory triangulation is also present in our thesis. In accordance with Nøkleby (2011), while analyzing empirical data, rather than using familiar and data-suitable theory, or just describing data, different theoretical angles are put into the same set of data. For instance, while analyzing the areas of experience, we make use of different frameworks and examine our data from multiple perspectives (e.g. Pine and Gilmore 1999; Lagiewski and Zekan 2006; Fiore et al. 2012). On the other hand, we already stated the lack which exists in this theoretical field, which on one hand brought to our problem formulation and, on the other, limit the range of theories applicable in several cases.

Finally, *methodological triangulation* is probably the most discussed in the literature and it signifies the examination of the consistency of our findings generated by different data-collection method. In using multiple data-collection methods, "the main idea is to 'triangulate' or establish converging lines of evidence to make [our] findings as robust as possible" (Yin, 2002). Denzin (1978) lists two different kinds of methodological triangulation: *within-method* and *between-method*. Flick (2007) argues that the first is given when different ways of finding data are contained within one method, "are used systematically and are theoretically well founded" (2007: 73), for instance by looking both for semantic and narrative knowledge within one interview. Such eventuality, in our analysis, did not happen neither systematically, not theoretically founded as intended by Flick (2007).

Nevertheless, *between-method* triangulation has been used extensively in our analysis, considered as the combination of different methodological approaches, for instance, interviews and observation (Denzin 1978; Nøkleby 2011). Such triangulation can be seen, for instance, in the analysis of the role of the local community as a "staging tool" for the experience, or the consistency between the materials distributed to the tourist and the interpretation of the route that the Routes

of the Olive Tree intend to direct to visitors. Generally, our analysis included data generated from four qualitative methods: participant observation and field notes of observations, the transcripts from face-to-face, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, collection of documents (e.g. brochures) and netnography.

Potential issues in our use of triangulation have been listed for the types of triangulations presented above. Additionally, Yin (2013) underline the lack of training and expertise, which affect particularly the novice researchers, bringing them to be superficial in collecting data across different methods and in over-emphasizing one data source over the other. Given our lack of expertise in case study research, we consider ourselves to be particularly sensible to these potential pitfalls, and we accounted for them, trying to present a balanced and in-depth analysis.

2.7.2. General analytic strategy

Since we were both novice with case study research and since the analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed aspects of doing this kind of research (Yin 2013), we decided to follow a general analytic strategy, in order to link the collected data to some concepts of interest. *Relying on theoretical propositions* is one of the possible, general analytic strategies delineated by Yin (2013), which this research follows closely: in this strategy propositions organize the analysis by establishing analytical priorities, point the relevant patterns to be described, and the explanations to be examined (Ibid). We already described the influence of our deductive theory in our research, and we believe one of the consequences was the influence that the theory had in our way to 'play' with our data (Ibid) when coming back from our fieldwork and throughout our analysis.

Not all data were used in the same equal manner to produce the empirical results. For instance, when analyzing the areas of experiences that the Routes of the Olive Tree considers, we mostly used our transcripts and field notes whereas when analyzing the message that the Route sends to visitors we mostly relied on our field notes as well as the texts that we collected. Accordingly, when analyzing marketing tools, netnography and transcripts were mostly considered for social media and internet, while for events we used transcripts and field notes.

In other words, our triangulation was not a mechanical act, but followed a logic, which was partly in line with a *pattern-matching* technique (Yin 2013; Almutairi et al. 2014; Saunders et al., 2009), as it follows. Considering our propositions, while 'playing' with the data, each of us identified

"patterns" in our raw data that seemed promising and that we confronted with our propositions. A precise definition of what a "pattern" is does not exist, but it can be generally represented as "an arrangement of objects, occurrences, incidents, or behavioral actions that are seen as relevant in the raw data (Almutairi et al. 2014; Hak and Dul 2009). The primary value of using a pattern-matching technique, indeed, is its ability to link the data to the theoretical propositions and to prior knowledge (Saunders et al., 2009; Almutairi et al. 2014).

Yet, in our analysis, the main aim was not confirming or disputing the propositions themselves or to test specific theories or hypotheses (as in Hak and Dul 2009), but building contextual explanations on whether and why the patterns are matched or not with our starting propositions (Almutairi et al. 2014). We believe this distinction is vital in our case: confronting patterns with propositions helped to build explanations, underline strengths and limitations underpinning the peculiar theoretical framework that we constructed, through multiple perspectives (Ibid). This eventually helped in refining our outcomes and answering to our research question.

As an example, when analyzing the transcript of P3, we encountered this statement: "*The visitor will go there, talk with Christina* [Skarpalezou]*, they will visit a mill that was doing what it is doing since a very long time, they will see some traditional things, the way that region is built, how the houses look how is the architecture of the region, the little streets, all these are interesting, how a product is cultivated, how they find it".* We could immediately relate what stated by P3 with the value of local community members in the staging of the route experience (a concept that came from our propositions), and we decided to operate a triangulation (with similarly identified statements of P2 and with our personal field notes) to better investigate the role of the local community members in relation with our propositions.

We acknowledge that pattern-matching is recognized by the literature to be complicated and confusing for case study research novices (Almutairi et al. 2014; Yin 2013). Therefore, in our data collection and analysis, we preferred to consider it only as a modest orientation in our general analytic strategy which, as already stated, relies mainly on our theory and on our theoretical propositions. The general limitation of such use of deductive theory has been addressed previously in this methodology.

2.7.3. Interpretation

Interpretation is said by Willig (2014:137) to be the core of qualitative research and aims to "generating a deeper and/or fuller understanding of the meaning(s)". It can be argued that our data

does not make any sense without interpretation. As stated by Willig (2014:136), "we need to make the data meaningful through a process of interpretation". Because of such characteristics, Gummesson (2003:484) states that "all research is interpretative" and hermeneutics is one of the ways to assess interpretation.

According to Gumesson (2003) and Willig (2014), hermeneutics relates "pre-understanding" (the interpreter's interpretation of the phenomenon in relation to the research question), with "understanding" (the improved understanding of it as the interpreter proceeds through the research). Across the project, understanding from the first phases of the research constitutes the pre-understanding for the next phase, etc. In other words, there is an oscillating movement between what we knew before and the new things we learn. This dynamic activity is called *hermeneutic spiral* (Ibid). An example of the implications for our project is that, given our initial deductive theory and the information collected during the first phases of our research (Getting ready, Case Study design and Preparation), our understanding of the field changed constantly throughout our data collection and analysis. For example, after our first interview with P1 in Athens, our pre-understanding that we had before going to Greece changed to a new understanding of the route experience. As a result, we arrived in Kalamata with a new pre-understanding, which was again changed after the first encounters with the personnel of the Routes of the Olive Tree. Consequently, our conclusions could constitute new pre-understandings of the topic for a future research project over the same problem area.

We as researchers are the interpreters of what will become a new pre-understanding on the basis of our own, existing pre-understanding; therefore, a potential issue of this process is the falsification of the other (Willig 2014). As constructivists, we acknowledge this implication, which is made even worse by the unavoidable biases of the researchers (Lichterman 2002; Musante and DeWalt 2010), and we find it necessary to point the characteristics of our interpretation out, as it affected our research methodology and our analysis.

Willig (2013) describes two different kinds of interpretation: *suspicious* and *empathic*, which are also called hermeneutics *of faith* and *of suspicion* (Cornish et al. 2014). Interpretation of faith attempts to understand the text treating the interpreted point of view as authentic (Cornish et al. 2014), looking at the world through the participant's eyes (Lofland and Lofland 1995) and it is

not, usually, theory-driven (Willig 2013). Nevertheless, the result of such interpretation should not be a simple report of the participant's point of view, as the presence of the interpreter must still be accounted: for example, a lack of a text can be a major text in the eyes of the interpreter (Ibid). But the relationship between the interpreter and the interpreted is not unbalanced as in hermeneutics of suspicion (Ibid). On the other hand, hermeneutics of suspicion is often theory-driven, and it critically engage a text, or a participant, to uncover its meaning (Cornish et al. 2014). A critique is that interpretation is biased towards the theory, as data is forced to fit it, affecting the research's reliability (Popper 1945, cited in Willig 2014). However, confirming or validating the theory is not necessarily the interpretation's main goal, especially in single case studies. As argued by Flyvberg (2006) and as it will be also analyzed in the Quality of Research, single case studies can very often lead to disconfirmation of theories. In any case, the risk of misrepresentation of the interpreted is higher in hermeneutics of suspicion (Willig 2014).

We recognize our deductive theory to have a noticeable impact on our research and on our interpretation, and therefore we often engage critically with the text, as it can be seen throughout our analysis. This would bring our hermeneutics to be suspicious. On the other hand, we acknowledge the risks of misrepresentation and we agree with Lofland and Lofland (1995) about the need to engage in an empathic relationship with our case. Therefore we tried to carry an emphatic interpretation as well, despite the notable risk to become advocates of the Routes of the Olive Tree (Yin 2013).

The reader may see statements from our participants' interviews being criticized and contrasted in many occasions by different data (e.g. our personal notes or the collected documents) or by other statements, in relation with the attempt to investigate our sources through our theoretical lens (Willig 2014). On other hand, in some occasions this is less evident. For instance, our participants' perspective is predominant in analyzing the areas of the Route's experience, as the researchers could not personally observe, or enquiry tourists experiencing the Route of the Olive Tree. Most importantly, we trusted our participants when they defined the "key members" of the Route (e.g. Trigilidas, KCVB, members of the Cultural Foundation) that could help us in answering to our research question and and when they provided us with information about important attractions along the Route. This was even due to our time and resource constrains, which limited our capacity to assess every possible attraction and partner. Yet, when the opportunity arose to personally

interview Mr and Mrs Skarpalezou as well as the volunteer at the Ancient Messene, we adopted a more critical, suspicious stance (Cornish et al. 2014) and we decided to personally verify their role as described by the Routes of the Olive Tree.

As argued by Willig (2014) and Cornish et al. (2014), analysis should always carry on both hermeneutics, producing an empathic reading as well as a critical reflection, which relate with each other throughout the analysis and define peculiar interpreters' hermeneutics (Willig 2014). Indeed, we believe our analysis to be a detailed portrait of our hermeneutics.

3. THEORY

Before proceeding to the analysis section of this master thesis, we will first construct a theoretical framework related to experiential marketing and the concept of differentiation through experiences. After introducing the 'experience' concept in relation to cultural routes, we will account for theories that reflect aspects of experiential marketing, including "experiential' aspects of the consumer experience, which involve different areas of experience but also concepts such as authenticity. Following this, we will discuss different related concepts, including theming, the conveyance of the message, staging of the experience and marketing tools. These concepts are examined in this section in order to drive our subsequent analysis.

3.1. The 'experience' concept

"Experience is the new currency of the modern marketing landscape, because experiences are life and people talk about life every day" (Smilansky 2009:10).

3.1.1. The 'Experience Economy'

During the course of the last years, there has been an increasing trend towards creating, staging and 'selling experiences' to consumers, which has been characterized as a 'post-fordist' tourism trend, also known as the 'new tourism' (Prats 2011; Urry 1990; Majdoub 2011). The 'new consumer' –in our case the 'new tourist', who also requires a new type of tourist product- is more experienced, more educated and more impulsive (Aguiló et al. 2005). Additionally, this new type of tourist has a higher level of environmental and cultural awareness, seeks experiences focused on knowledge, discovery, relaxation and enjoyment (UNWTO 2015) and is "place specific" and "experience specific" (Ashworth and Tunbridge 2005: 46), in the sense that the distinctive narrative advantage of a "unique value proposition" is based on the specific resources and characteristics of the region, creating circumstances to have a "unique experience" (Marzo-Navarro and Pedraja-Iglesias 2010).

The notion of experience entered the field of consumption with Holbrook and Hirschman's (1982: 99) pioneering work, which addressed "those facets of consumer behavior that relate to the multi-sensory, fantasy, and emotive aspects of product use". Since then, the conceptualization of consumption experience has gained more attention and has resulted to the rise of an "experience economy" (Pine and Gilmore 1999), also referred as "attention economy" (Davenport and Beck

2002), “entertainment economy” (Hackley and Tiwsakul 2006), “emotion economy” (Gobe and Zyman 2001) or “dream society” (Jensen 2001). The “experience economy” is being hailed, after the extraction of commodities, the production of goods and the delivery of services, as the fourth economic offering in the history of the humankind, that wants services to be re-packaged and presented as experiences (Pine an Gilmore 1999; Schmitt 1999; Tynan and McKechnie 2009).

3.1.2. Experiential tourism and cultural routes

According to Prentice (2001:9), cultural tourism is essentially experiential, increasingly becoming a tourism genre per se and through a “discretely-packaged experience”, offers the ‘non-tourist’ tourist experience. A lot of attention has been particularly drawn on cultural routes, which is a product related with cultural tourism and which creates a pull factor that attracts modern travelers, who increasingly seek enriching and authentic experiences that entail more learning, discovery and contact with local people and their traditions (UNWTO 2015). In a similar vein, Majdoub (2011) points out that cultural routes do not only constitute a form of cultural consumption but also a form of experience: they constitute a new concept, which responds to modern tourists’ expectations, more experiential. In general, cultural routes are such thematic roads where the central theme is some kind of cultural value or heritage element and cultural attractions have dominant role (Piskóti and Nagy 2014). Moreover, as they are thematic routes, they are in line with a key experience-design principle suggested by Pine and Gilmore (1999), which includes theming the experience.

While the content of a destination, however, revolves around attractions, where an attraction is defined as “an agglomeration of experiences, facilities and services”, Haldrup (2001 in Framke 2002:103) underlines how, in mobile forms of tourism such as cultural routes, “a heterogeneous tourist space is produced through a pattern of mobility that is quite indifferent to local places and national boundaries”, by moving across regions. To give an example, the single ports in which a tourist stop during a cruise trip can be considered by some a destination, whereas for others the destination is the cruise itself (Buhalis 2000). If traditionally destinations “are regarded as well-defined geographical areas, such as a country, an island or a town” (Hall 2000; Davidson and Maitland 1997 in Buhalis 2000: 97), contemporary conceptualizations of the term account for the subjective consumer interpretation, depending on a range of personal factors, such as itinerary, cultural background, purpose, education and past experience. Moreover, it is argued by Framke

(2002) that destinations exist as narratives created by marketing and places created and structured through social actions at various levels. Therefore, although a cultural route can genuinely be a destination, it becomes apparent that its nature as a whole is more complex than the single destinations and attractions found along the way.

In particularly, Murray and Graham (1997), Majdoub (2011) and Piskóti and Nagy (2014) emphasize the heterogeneous nature of cultural routes, which operate at a variety of spatial scales and diverse cultural contexts. Therefore, they are much more than just roads with signage. Puczko and Ratz (2003: 411) stress their complicated nature by characterizing them "both tourism products and methods". Furthermore, cultural routes are also thoroughly examined by Majdoub (2011) from a cultural consumption perspective, arguing that they provide the links among disparate experiences for a more comprehensive visitor experience and, therefore, are referred to a holistic destination approach. Moreover, this particular tourist product is considered to be in fact a way of consuming experiences, as it corresponds to tourists who do not simply want to learn about other cultures and increase their knowledge but wish to be involved and absorbed in the experience, the tourists who want "to be" (Ibid).

To sum up, given the distinctiveness that characterizes them, cultural routes bear multidimensional and multidisciplinary aspects and cannot be obviously compared to a single destination e.g. a town. For all above reasons, we have become curious in investigating how experiences are used in the context of such a route, such as the Routes of the Olive Tree.

3.2. Experiential marketing: a differentiator

As mentioned above, destinations as a space are created by the tourism industry through narratives, images and brands promoted through marketing mediation (Framke 2002). Competition based on experiences constitutes a more recent approach to destination marketing (Lagiewski and Zekan 2006), as traditional approaches are losing effectiveness (Smilansky 2009). Traditional marketing views consumers as rational decision-makers who only care about functional features and benefits, while, in contrast, experiential marketers view consumers both as rational and emotional human beings, who create value along with the producer (Schmitt 1999). The idea that functional features of goods and services are not sufficient in order to achieve differentiation (Pine and Gilmore 1999) has been used in tourism and has developed into an idea that it is no longer sufficient for

destinations to compete with their facilities and amenities, but instead if they want to attract visitors, they need to create differentiating experiences (Lagiewski and Zekan 2006), by creating a closer bond between the customer and the producer and immersing them in a pleasurable and memorable experience (Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Schmitt 1999; Tynan and McKechnie 2009; Hulten 2011; Feng and Lee 2013). Additionally, it is suggested that experiences can help destinations in reaching goals (such as increasing customer loyalty, creating an emotional bond and providing reasons for them to want to return) that differentiation based on price and/or addition of new services and activities fail to reach (Lagiewski and Zekan 2006).

Therefore, as a result of the increasing difficulties of differentiating goods and services as well as the recognition of the importance of customer experiences in the development of brand ambassadors (Carbone and Haeckel 1994; Gentile et al. 2007) and the wide use of information and communication technology (Schmitt 1999; Tynan and McKechnie 2009), companies and organizations must find new ways to add value and achieve a competitive advantage and, therefore, there is the need to adopt a new type of marketing, new concepts and methodologies. Due to the current challenges, a lot of interest has turned to "experiential marketing", whose ultimate goal should be to create holistic experiences that integrate individual experiences into a holistic gestalt (Schmitt 1999). More specifically, in the case of cultural routes, which are are seen both as a tool of diversifying a tourism product and as a way of distinguishing places (Majdoub 2011), the aim of such strategy should be to develop and communicate a multifaceted and unique gestalt of a single route. Therefore, in this master thesis, we will examine how this diversification is achieved by the Routes of the Olive Tree, by examining the way they create, stage and 'sell' experiences.

3.3. Aspects of the experience

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982)'s work is particularly significant, as they were the first to identify emotion as a crucial aspect of consumption and argues that active consumers search for three subjectively-based "experiential" aspects of the consumption experience: "fantasy, feelings and fun", also known as the "three Fs". According to Schmitt (1999), the consumption of "three Fs", which were later on extended to the "four Es" -experience, entertainment, exhibitionism and evangelizing- (Holbrook, 2000:178), has given rise to the need to entertain and emotionally affect consumers through the consumption of experiences.

On the other hand, Pine and Gilmore (1999), whose work is among the most popular along the literature, strongly argue that consuming experiences is not exclusively about entertainment but also engagement. They developed a framework for understanding and evaluating experiential consumptions, called "The Experience Realms Model", which can also be applied to the tourism industry. In such model, the topography of experience consumption is represented as divided into four realms: education, esthetics, escapism and entertainment.

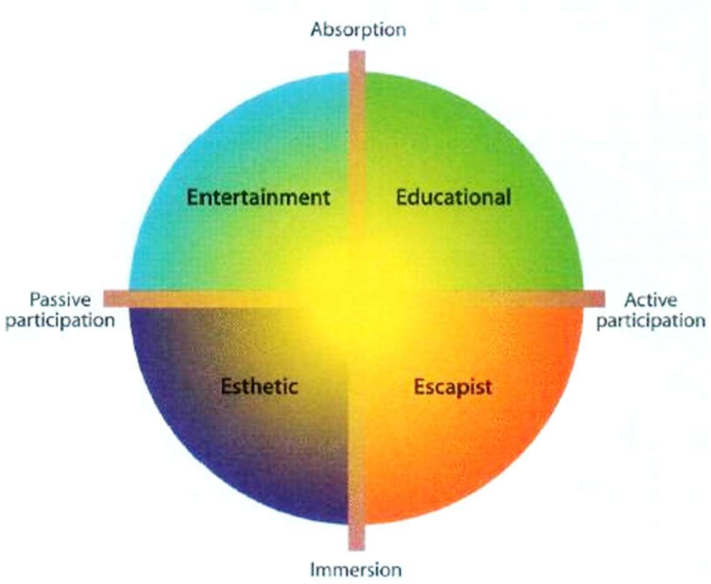


Figure 7 The four realms of an experience
SOURCE: Pine and Gilmore (1999)

These realms are categorized also according to where the experience is positioned in two dimensions, that is, whether it requires passive or active participation, and whether the experience results in the absorption or immersion of the participant. The application of such model to evaluate tourism experiences can be used, for instance, as follows: an experience which fully immerses the participant and involves active participation is in the escapist realm (e.g. participating in olive harvesting), whilst a fully immersive but passive experience would be in the esthetic realm (e.g. being surrounded by a scenic landscape with olive trees). Experiences where participants are absorbed and active fall into the educational realm (e.g. getting new knowledge about the olive oil production) and those which are absorbing but passive (e.g. attending a musical concert) are to be found in the entertainment realm.

In "The Experience Realms Model", the most compelling experiences encompass all aspects of the four realms, and therefore can be placed at the center of the diagram (Pine and Gilmore 1999;

Hayes and MacLeod 2006). The center of the model represents, consequently, the ideal experience that should be attempted to achieve. Lagiewski and Zekan (2006) adapted the "The Experience Realms Model" for tourism planners to evaluate all aspects of a tourism experience. As an example, the authors placed a canoeing event in the framework to assess whether the event is complete under all the frameworks' realms, as represented in the following figure.

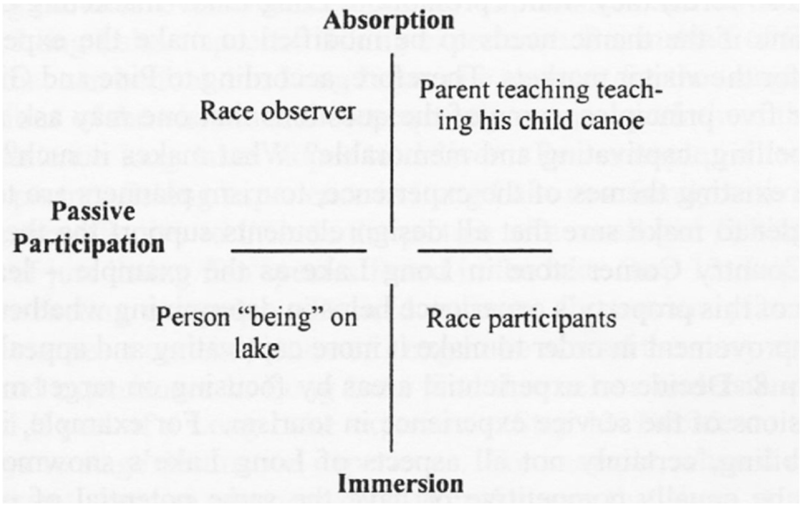


Figure 8 The Experience Realm Model - Example
SOURCE: Lagiewski and Zekan (2006)

While Lagiewski and Zekan (2006) adopt a kind of experience assessment in line with Pine and Gilmore (1999), with the aim for destination marketers to reach all aspects of the four realms (the center of the model), Fiore et al. (2007) argue that small and rural businesses that lacks in resources should, initially, focus on one or two of the experiential realms, design the experience and then augment their experiential offerings from the initial focus over time, as an incremental approach is considered to be more realistic.

These uses of Pine and Gilmore (1999)'s framework aims at making clear, for marketers, what a single resource, as part of a destination, is made of in terms of experience, what is the engagement of visitor, and finally how different experiences coexist around a resource. The framework is conceptually intuitive, and valuable for tourism industry (Jurowski 2009). Consequently, it is an important tool for route planners to verify if the experience of the route delivers the expected results in targeted tourists. Although empirical evidence of the validity and feasibility of such framework is minimal and more data needs to be collected in general, not just for cultural routes (Ibid), it will be used in our analysis to examine whether such areas describe comprehensively and correspond to the different experiences used by the Routes of the Olive Tree in order to achieve differentiation.

However, in opposition to the above framework, Robertson and Wilson (2008) suggest that flow, which is described as the enjoyable psychological state consumers feel when totally immersed in an activity, exclusively depends on active participation and should be a central focal point to any manager's plans (in Strategic Direction 2008). Li and Li (2011) agree that tourism products provided with active participation and interaction are absorbing more and more tourists. Nevertheless, there is an agreement that interaction should be put at the heart of the experience as consumers not only receive experiences in a multisensory mode but they also respond to them (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Richards and Bonink 1994). However, Ritchie and Crouch (2010) state that experiences are made up of all of the interactions, behaviors and emotions which each tourist permits their five senses to perceive and absorb, implying what Pine and Gilmore (1999) have also argued, that individuals are engaged entirely in a personal way and it cannot be the case that two people have the same experience: thus a differentiated experience can be hard to duplicate.

As argued by Schmitt (1999:60), managers can create different types of customer experiences by using his "strategic experiential modules" or SEMs, which are referred to "circumscribed functional domains of the mind and behavior". He identified five different types of experiences-modules: sensory experiences (SENSE), affective experiences (FEEL), creative cognitive experiences (THINK), physical experiences, behaviors and lifestyles (ACT) and social-identity experiences that result from relating to a reference group or culture (RELATE). The SENSE module, or SENSE marketing, aims at creating sensory experiences, through the five senses while FEEL marketing appeals to customers' inner feelings and emotions that range from mildly positive moods to strong emotions of joy and pride. THINK marketing aims at creating cognitive, problem-solving experiences (eg. Microsoft's campaign 'Where Do You Want to Go Today?') whereas ACT marketing targets customers' physical experiences, showing them alternative ways of doing things, alternative lifestyles and behaviors. Finally, RELATE marketing, while incorporating aspects of all previously mentioned modules, expands beyond the consumers' personal feelings and relates them to something outside their private state. Similarly to Schmitt (1999), Gentile et al., (2007) argue that an offering must provide a strong sensorial component focusing on the five senses in order to provoke aesthetical pleasure, excitement and satisfaction.

Therefore, it becomes evident that there is a range of aspects that should be part of the experience offering and we are interested in investigating whether and how such "experiential" values are used by the Routes of the Olive Tree to achieve differentiation.

3.3.1. Authenticity

Authenticity can be considered to be another important "experiential" value. According to Pine and Gilmore (2007), markets are being increasingly filled with "sensationally staged experiences" and the authors claim that, as "quality" was the determinant aspect in customer decision-making in the service economy, "authenticity" is, instead, what drives customer decision-making in the experience economy: what customers want, today, is an experience that is perceived as "authentic", or real, as opposed to one perceived as "fake" (Pine and Gilmore 2007; Murray et al. 2010; Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011). Prentice (2001:9), from his side argues that what cultural tourism offers to consumers is an evocation of the authentic that is, however "real" and "direct". Besides, Moscardo and Pearce (1999: 418) argue that, from a consumer perspective, cultural tourism ranges from settings to "moments of involved or experienced authenticity". According to Pine and Gilmore (2007), organizations today must address this issue as the one of the quality of the experience: in order to be considered of good quality, experiences need to be considered as authentic. Similarly, Hall (1999) views authenticity as an element that is also promoted effectively by 'place-branding' or 'place myth'. For him, if skillfully designed, place-branding properly seeks to provide a clear and distinct image by which to differentiate a destination from others, evoke associations of quality and relationships with tourists, deliver long-term competitive advantage as well as offer something greater than a simple set of physical attributes. Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. (2011:82) gives the example of "Destination Europe", where authenticity is "the single biggest selling factor" for long-haul visitor markets and argues that it is precisely this authentic experience that is central to the destinations that make up Europe's Cultural Routes. The issue of authenticity is, therefore, critical to assess when marketing an experience.

The concept of authenticity, however, has been widely debated in the tourism literature, to the point that some suggests it should be abandoned, as so many different conceptualizations exist that any research over the genuineness and authenticity of objects, artifacts, culture and everything related with the tourism experience will result in a contradictory result (Reisinger and Steiner 2005). Objectivists, constructivists and postmodernists' debate over what "authenticity" means

since Boorstin (1961) and McCannell (1973) criticized tourism mass commodification for threatening and, ultimately, jeopardizing the authenticity of foreign cultures. McCannell (1973) argues that tourists seek something extraordinary, maybe escapist, but they are not able to experience authenticity, as hosts usually cheat backstage areas for tourists' consumption, while on the other hand keeping the meaningful authenticity of their culture away from tourists, in order to protect it. Therefore, an artifact or any example of material culture can be said to be authentic or not basing on whether it is delivered for tourism consumption or made according to an authentic local tradition (McCannell 1973; Boorstin 1961).

Against such conceptualization, constructivists argue that authenticity by itself is a socially constructed concept, subjected to the ideas, the context and generally the observer's point of view (Cohen 1985). Authenticity is not something hidden by the host from the eyes of the visitors, but is constructed by the dialogue between the host and the tourist, basing on each other's points of view (Adams 1996). Postmodernists, finally, argue that tourists do not care for authentic experiences at all (Reisinger and Steiner 2005). According to Cohen (1995), postmodern tourists accept inauthentic experiences as long as the experience provides entertainment, while Wang (1999) argues that an "existential authenticity" is experienced when tourists engage themselves in extraordinary activities, or in something new, unusual, not part of the ordinary life. Many studies document the use of images of authenticity by host organizations, which aim at raising sales and visitors' interest, for example by restricting the production, creating a sensation of exclusiveness that is perceived as authenticity by tourists (Reisinger and Steiner 2005).

In our research, we are not interested in assessing whether the experience of the Route of the Olive Tree is truly genuine or authentic: on one hand, we generally agree with Reisinger and Steiner (2005) that the concept is too contradictive, and debated, for such an enquiry to be effective; on the other hand, our paradigmatic stance aligns us with the constructivist critique, and we consider authenticity to be a socially constructed concept. Yet, we consider authenticity to be, as pointed out by Pine and Gilmore (2007) and Hall (1999), a critical area of the experience to be considered from a supply perspective. What we are interested in is, consequently, the role of authenticity in the more general Route experience, from the perspective of the Cultural Foundation: whether authenticity is assessed as part of the route experience, its importance and contribution to the Route differentiation.

3.4. Theming

One of the key principles of experiential marketing is envisioning a well-defined theme (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Lagiewski and Zekan 2006; Williams 2006; Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011). Compared to Lagiewski and Zekan (2006:167), who argue that well designed themes inform people what to expect at the destination and determine "a memorable experience". Mossberg (2007), in his study about factors that influence the tourist experience also suggests that a theme about a tourist attraction or destination allowed for more meaningful experiences. Consequently, theming allows for a verbal and visual representation which is likely to be received as a positive experience for the tourist (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Lagiewski and Zekan 2006; Mossberg 2007).

Thematic routes are considered to be attached to attractions organically tied to the geographical space and, by connecting attractions with similar characteristics, emphasize the individuality and uniqueness derived from that space (Majdoub 2011). Schneider (2004), in his checklist for creating a tour experience, classifies the selection of a theme from the beginning to be carried throughout the whole consumption experience as first. Thus, determining, developing and delivering on the theme is an activity that planners should consider having an influence both in the pre-consumption and in consumption phase of the experience (Tynan and McKechnie 2009).

Regarding cultural routes, in particular, the creation of a unifying, common and coherent theme is of primary importance in tourists' interpretation of the route and its identity (Hardy 2003), as it is the theming of the route that connect all of its attractions (Nagy 2012). Therefore, the selection of attractions should denote a cogent theme. In European Cultural Routes that are presented as a whole with a common thematic denominator "the theme of the Route is the binding factor and the strength of the theme is a clear motivating factor" (Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011:37). Themes are consequently considered as the "common tourism rationale" behind route development, which should influence the message of the route experience that is conveyed to the visitor, and carry out its coherence and differentiation (Sugio 2005; Hayes and MacLeod 2006). In this sense, themes have a great influence over the content of the messages that are sent to the visitors.

Regarding our case, we consider that the Routes of the Olive Tree has already established a theme, since all Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe represent attractions that are thematically linked

(Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011). What we are curious in finding out is whether the Routes of the Olive Tree has developed a well-defined theme and whether the delivered theme brings the impressions together in one cohesive narrative.

3.4.1. Considerations about theming

Whereas in private business or services the concept of implementing a theme could seem to be a pretty straightforward process, this is not the case for a complex reality such as a destination (Ooi 2012; Lagiewski and Zekan 2006). Having already discussed the peculiarities that characterize cultural routes, it can be similarly hard, for a cultural route, to implement a successful theme. As specified by Ooi (2012), private firms can count on a degree of control and elasticity that allows them to detach the product core functions and implications from the way it is interpreted by the customer as an experience. As an example, cigarettes in the past have been successfully associated with free life, instead of an unhealthy vice. Destinations, on the other hand, are defined as "place-based products" that can be altered to a certain degree with new investments, infrastructures, attractions, but not as much as other products (Ibid:124). Singapore's Chinatown is given by Chang and Yeoh, (1999) and Henderson (2000) as an example of destination thematization which 'went too far', raising clear issues in terms of community sustainability. In theming different areas of Singapore according to a general intense Chinese experience (Henderson 2000), destination marketers used what has been criticized as an excessively market-oriented approach, detached by the authentic place peculiarities as perceived by its numerous community members.

In support of this, Wheeler et al. (2011) argue that, theming as every aspect of marketing and branding a destination should derive from the latter's identity, that is conceptualized as the way the community, as destination owners, "want the destination to be perceived" (Ibid:16), encompassing all the values of the related sense of place. This is in accordance with a number of studies that stress the importance of a democratic and community-sustainable approach to route management (Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011; UNWTO 2015; Piskóti and Nagy 2014). However, the engagement of local communities in the design, operation and interpretation of routes has been recognized as a major challenge (UNWTO 2015) and therefore, in our analysis, it will be important to assess the positions of the Routes of the Olive Tree towards the role of the local community, and, in general, community-sustainability issues regarding theming.

Nevertheless, a problem may also arise when different members or groups in the local community show conflictual ideas that need a clear management. Apart from achieving a sustainable and democratic approach, what is also identified as a major challenge is that all members and groups in area of the route must interpret the theme of the route in a similar way (UNWTO 2015), as the search of this common coherence and this continuity is very significant in terms of image and visibility for the destination (Majdoub 2011). Yet, Kalandides (2011) reports an example of a conflicting situation regarding the case of Bogotá, showing that, whereas the input of community members is important, professional consultants and practitioners are still responsible for the strategy design and the need to negotiate between different angles must be considered. Therefore, as also recognized by Lagiewski and Zekan (2006), to determine whether any of the experiences are or can be themed, or whether there is a general theme emerging at the destination, is a complex challenge for destination planners.

Finally, Piskóti and Nagy (2014) point out that the more complex a tourism product is, the broader and well-planned co-operation should be in order for a destination to be able to deliver a well-defined theme. The complexity that characterize cultural routes has been already discussed and, therefore, in our analysis, we will also account for such challenges related to the definition and interpretation of the theme of the Routes of the Olive Tree, by the Cultural Foundation, as well as KCVB and the travel agency Trigilidas.

3.5. Message(s) of the route experience

Considering the fact that themes should influence the message of the route experience in the eyes of the visitors (Sugio 2005; Hayes and MacLeod 2006) it is interesting to explore other aspects which are related with conveyance of the message(s) of the route experience to visitors.

3.5.1. Visitor's interpretation

According to Lagiewski and Zekan (2006), practitioners need to carefully assess the impression that visitors should get out of the experience they will have at the destination, considering that one attraction, activity or event, trigger different images in visitors' mind. For example, a sport activity can be portrayed as competitive, for enthusiasts' sake, or relaxing, for the leisure of the entire family, depending on the message that the visitor should get through different media (Ibid). Interpretation, as conceptualized by Mariotti (2012) and Hardy (2003), is then important to

consider, since it is related with “how visitors interpret the messages that are sent to them” (2003). Especially in the context of route tourism, interpretation is argued to be critical in signage design for roads and sites, brochures, visitor centers and map design, as it is the principal mean for the tourist to understand what experience the route is about (Hayes and Macleod 2006).

Lagiewski and Zekan (2006) argue that a particular focus should be put on the engagement of the five senses: touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste, which corresponds to Schmitt’s (1999) SENSE experiential strategies, aim at value enhancement of the product and differentiation through holistic sensory excitement and engagement. On the other hand, Hardy (2003) considers that interpretation in route tourism should also lead to an educational experience in order to influence “attitudes and beliefs towards certain topics and help to facilitate sustainable tourism by encouraging certain forms of behavior”, a viewpoint that corresponds to Schmitt’s (1999) ACT marketing, which was previously mentioned. From their side, Poulsson and Kale (2004) consider learning to be an essential sphere of the customer experience, alongside engagement and surprise. In general, visitors’ interpretation of messages while on the route should be at the same time enjoyable and relevant, as successful experience should be both entertaining and educational at the same time (Hardy 2003; Tynan and McKechnie 2009).

Other than being contradictory, the coexistence of different messages at one time is argued by Schmitt (1999:62) to be positive, as experiential strategies should not be considered as “self-contained structures; instead they are connected and interact”, and broadening the experience kinds and angles is argued to be a key of successful communication strategies, which should be as much holistic as possible. Moreover, since the phenomenon of cultural routes is also referred to a holistic destination approach, based on cultural consumption (Majdoub 2011), it is important that the messages are coherent, as these consumption objects are consumed “for what they communicate and mean to oneself and one's surroundings, and hence they become part of consumers' identity formation processes”.

In addition, Hardy underlines how tourists need messages to be interpreted while routing, but also beforehand, as the planning phase has been found to be extremely relevant for route tourism (2003). Therefore, planners should consider both phases as important to assess, when evaluating the messages that are sent to visitors. In their holistic model of customer experience, Tynan and

McKechnie (2009) consider the pre-consumption phase as a critical part of experience consumption. At this stage, in such framework, imagining, planning, and information seeking are interconnected activities that furnish consumption preparation and that influence the subsequent "core experience" (2009: 508).

Thus, while considering all above, it is interesting to examine the consistency of the messages that are sent to tourists through, for example, informative material sent to visitors and the Foundation's website. In addition, since cohesion of messages is important, we will also examine the messages conveyed across of the route (eg. archaeological sites, museum) as well as from other sources, such as KCVB.

3.5.2. Use of language

In their study, Hayes and Macleod (2006) enlist important aspects that regards message and interpretation evaluation, which focus particularly on the language, storytelling and visual devices used to make visitors live the route experience. The authors, in examining the information material of heritage routes in Britain, divided the type of language between rational and evocative. While rational language includes utilitarian references to product features (Zarantonello et al. 2013) and is described as factual, academic, distant, often sophisticated and technical, evocative language evokes sensations, feelings and emotions, imaginations and lifestyles and results in an affective response (e.g., liking) (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Schmitt 1999).

While Hayes and Macleod's (2006) findings underline a major use of rational language, they argue that language should be less rational and more evocative, without assuming that the visitor knows what planners are talking about, or that the visitor share the same interpretation patterns of the planner: a trail developed by archeologists, for example, should not be addressed to archeologists. Planners should avoid unnecessary sophisticated language and, instead, make showcases of the past as well as romantic references and focus on the use of powerful "experiential" words such as "discover', 'experience', 'immerse', 'visualize', 'remember' and 'taste", which involve a personal, and emotional engagement (Ibid). With this aim in mind, the use of third person, which is consistent with the use of rational language, should be dropped in favor of an evocative first person, as this is argued to be immediate and inviting (Ibid). Therefore, while to be educational is considered a goal for the design of the route experience (Nagy 2012) and should, consequently

affect message planning and evaluation, language in use should be informal, direct, personal and engaging, and not excessively didactic or academic (Hayes and MacLeod 2006). What will, therefore, be assessed in our analysis is the style of language used by the Cultural Foundation in their informative material, posters and website, while also comparing it to material produced by other sources.

3.5.3. Storytelling

Evocative language should connote the stories that are told to the visitor about the route, whose quality is critical in determining the value of the route experience, as stories are considered to be strong and engaging experience-delivery tools (Tussyadiah et al. 2011) and act as a means to enhance tourist experiences (Mason and O' Mahony 2007). A compelling, emotional and immersive story is, at the same time, dependent on its underpinning, distinctive and coherent proposition (Hayes and MacLeod 2006). The importance of coherence is recognized by Zabbini (2012) as well, in his analysis of the "Hannibal pathway" of the Phoenician route of the Council of Europe: "The path is divided into sub-nets and the networks into sites with a common coherence". Furthermore, the storytelling behind the route is dependent on the route's inventory of assets: some destinations can count on pre-existing unique historical or architectural connotations (such as middle age ruins), while others have to build distinctive stories basing on more creative associations. For instance, the aforementioned "Hannibal pathway" stands as a good example of a meaningful route entirely built over immaterial heritage Zabbini (2012). Hence, since telling a compelling story should be the aim in order to attract and satisfy visitors by providing a memorable experience (Hayes and MacLeod 2006), it is important to explore if that is the case with the Routes of the Olive Tree.

3.5.4. Visual devices

The use of visual devices, such as photographic and illustrative material, is considered another key takeaway for conveying evocative messages (Hayes and MacLeod 2006). It is suggested that, in order to enhance the tourism experience and bound the peculiar experience at the destination with the visitor, when producing visual material, planners should make a link of formal tourism products (e.g. museums and historic houses) with the so called "informal products" (e.g. everyday culture and people, open markets, pubs, local artifacts), which convey a vivid sense of local culture

(Ibid:49). Images showing people or communities and generally soft focus shots and illustrations, such as, for example, contemporary photographic images but also historical (black and white) images that have an atmospheric quality, are more effective in creating a bond and an evocative mood for the prospective visitor in comparison to harsh focus photography, which is associated with what the use of rational language evokes (Ibid). The goal, then, is to send messages that strengthen route coherence, enhancing differentiation, and last but not least promote the connection between communities, culture and attractions as a socially desirable effect (Csapo and Berki 2008; Nagy 2012). According to Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. (2011), it is the sense of narrative that "provide the essential link between people, communities, places, institutions and times" (Ibid:34).

As a consequence, in our analysis we will analyze all aforementioned 'experiential' elements in relation to our case study and we will provide examples of them in relation to other sources of information, while also questioning the coherence of other material that can be found along the route and in the visitor centers.

3.6. Staging of the experience

Lagiewski and Zekan (2006) suggest that marketers should also decide on the most effective ways to stage the experience. According to Fiore et al. (2007) and Williams (2006), every realm of Pine and Gilmore (1999)'s four realms of experience should be connected with peculiar tools or means staged on the destination. As an example, in order to achieve educational experience, tourism organizations usually stage education programs, informal lectures, guides or background information (e.g. at heritage sites), while cruise ships organize lectures about their itineraries and hotels encourage their guests to engage with locals (Williams 2006). Consequently, according to Lagiewski and Zekan (2006) tourism planners need a clear idea on what experience needs to be promoted regarding a particular attraction. In accordance, a clear direction should be drawn for delivering that experience to everyone involved, and related tools are implemented. Examples are teachers, recruiting points or information about the best observation points (Ibid).

Generally, according to Williams (2006), a strategy for staging an experience should always implement four steps, with the first being developing a cohesive theme, whose importance has already been addressed. As a second step, planners should provide 'positive cues' (Pine and

Gilmore 1999; Williams 2006; Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Fiore et al. 2007) that are developed according to the theme, trigger impressions that fulfill it and operate to support it through adequate sensorial stimuli. Conversely, as a third step, planners should operate for eliminating negative cues, namely anything that is inconsistent with the unity of the theme, anything that distracts from the theme, as an entire experience can be spoiled by a single inconsistent message (Williams 2006; Fiore et al. 2007).

Organizations in need of executing the above steps can count on a number of resources: display tools, such as signage and informative panels (Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Fiore et al. 2007; Hardy 2003), the involvement of personal interaction with people, either local community members (Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Fiore et al. 2007; Hardy 2003; Murray et. al 2010), employed personnel (Lagiewski and Zekan 2006) or volunteers (Hayes and MacLeod 2006), informative material (Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Williams 2006), commentary points (Hayes and MacLeod 2006) and finally the pre-existing properties of the environment, such as a scenic or historical particular value (Fiore et al. 2007).

A distinguished example of effective experiential staging in tourism, according to the aforementioned elements, can be found in Walt Disney World (Williams 2006). On the other hand, Lagiewski and Zekan (2006) note what has already been argued in our theory that for a private business controlled by a single organization, such as Walt Disney World, it is certainly easier to stage a peculiar visitor experience accordingly than for an entire destination. Considerations similar to the ones of theming can, therefore, be drawn for experience stage in tourism, since destinations' nature is place-embedded (Campelo et al. 2014; Wheeler et al. 2011).

In support of this, Prentice (2001) also considers other factors in the staging of an experience at a destination, which may not be directly and formally constructed by tourism suppliers (festivals, heritage centers, guided walks, for example). He argues, particularly about cultural tourism, that, although "colors, animation, smells, sounds and interaction are potentially all part of the product offering" (Ibid:1) and could be deliberately staged by organizations, there are also other elements and products that are implicit in a place, such as markets and cafes for example. As a consequence, experience may be mediated by a tourism organization, through a guided walk, but it can also be immediate, by running, for instance, into a temporary open market.

According to such multifaceted, place-embedded framework, in which different interests of local community groups are also to be considered (Campelo et al. 2014; Wheeler et al. 2011) planners' degree of control of positive and negative cues to stage on a route is qualitatively different in reality than how it is presented in the literature (Hayes and MacLeod 2006). Still, according to Hayes and MacLeod (2006), route developers should not desist in developing devices and opportunities for staging the route experience, in terms of negative and positive cues. Considering that tools can be still implemented, the authors suggest the use of panels/signage, visitor centers, special events, and the promotion of the relationships with local community groups, which is argued to provide legitimacy to the route (Ibid). All above elements will be analyzed in the following section in relation with the Routes of the Olive Tree.

3.7. Marketing tools

Before deciding upon which marketing tools to develop and in order to effectively achieve diversification, tourism organizations should consider identifying visitor markets based on experience types of current and potential visitors, as the 'new tourists' have specific and varied interests and needs (Ibid; UNWTO, 2015; Moscardo 2005; Khovanova-Rubicondo et. al 2011; Hardy 2003). However, despite the importance of conducting a market analysis, this is often ignored. Several reasons for this are identified by Moscardo (2005):

- a lack of government and other funding support for market research
- a reliance on stereotypes of particular markets particularly for ecotourism
- a tendency to identify products and experiences before seeking appropriate markets
- an over reliance on the experience of a limited range of industry experts and consultants

The consequence for sustainable tourism management is "a lack of marketing expertise and a failure to understand, attract and satisfy appropriate tourist groups" (Ibid:36), which can result to the coexistence of different segments of visitors: this can eventually lead to conflicts which bring one segment's experience to damage the experience of the other, as in the case of the cultural route Santiago de Compostela (Murray and Graham 1997). It is, therefore, interesting to investigate whether the Routes of the Olive Tree conducts a comprehensive market analysis as part of their marketing strategy.

Lagiewski and Zekan (2006) argue that, once the target markets are specified, the goal then becomes to decide upon best ways possible for promoting the destination experience. It should be

noted that in the transition from a goods-dominant to a service-dominant logic, which introduce the experience economy and the rise of experiential marketing, the previous concept of "promotion" is commutated into "dialogue" with the customer, fostering tools which feature co-creation, active engagement and collaboration in delivering the message (Tynan and McKechnie 2009; Smilansky 2009; Akyıldız et al. 2013). Majdoub (2011:34) agrees that there is a need for visitors to co-create their service experience, as it is "their personal thoughts, feelings, imaginations and the unique backgrounds that visitors bring with them to the leisure setting".

Therefore, since traditional media channels and one-way communications are losing effectiveness, it is critical that planners develop marketing tools, which are not simply used to send messages to costumers, but which, instead, embrace two-way interaction (Smilansky 2009) and meaningful and specific value for individual consumers Majdoub (2011). We have identified in the literature that nowadays word of mouth, events, the use of social media and internet are good examples of experiential marketing communication and we are planning to assess their use in relation to the Routes of the Olive Tree.

3.7.1. Word of mouth

According to Smilansky (2009), word-of-mouth (WOM) is the most powerful and cost-effective marketing tool to consider within an experiential marketing strategy, because of the higher capacity of staged experiences to turn customers into brand ambassadors, raising customer loyalty. Blazinstar (2007 in Tynan and McKechnie 2009) agrees that personally relevant marketing experiences can generate brand advocacy, loyalty and word of mouth. Indeed, across various industry sectors, WOM is often considered as "the most influential source for consumer purchase decision" (Tham et al. 2013: 146; Cox et al. 2009) and the broadcasting of positive WOM from former tourists can enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of an information about a tourism destination (Leung et al. 2013; Smilansky 2009). The power that word of mouth has is noteworthy, as it is the power of personal recommendation. Besides Smilansky (2009) also points out that personal recommendation is a sign of success and in consequence, the fact that the consumer trusts and feels strongly about a particular company is an indicator that a real relationship has been established, which is among the purposes of experiential marketing strategies. On the other hand, Verhoef et al. (2009) suggest that the customer experience also encompasses the 'uncontrollable' factors, which are not under the control of the organization. Therefore, it must be also emphasized

that WOM might not always be positive. Indeed, interaction with others could totally either enhance the tourist experience or have a completely negative impact (Murray et al. 2010). Since WOM is such powerful tool, we are therefore prompt to explore whether the Routes of the Olive Tree is aware of its potentials, and how they exploit the route experience to broadcast positive WOM.

3.7.2. Events

Events are considered as important experiential marketing tools (Akyıldız et al. 2013; Dimanche 2008) that bring customers to "live, breathe and feel the brand through interactive sensory connections and activities" (Smilansky 2009:3). Getz (1997) conceptualizes events as "anything that is planned by an organization (in the context of a destination) to attract and satisfy customers and that is out of the ordinary". Themed events, in particular, galvanize support around concrete ideas and provide renewed energy (Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011). As the focus of the event experience is, then, on what a destination can offer to the tourists, events are particularly suitable, if properly organized and tailored for specific markets, as they help marketers in staging a valuable, memorable and engaging destination experience (Akyıldız et al. 2013) and for such reason they can act as a core experiential tool for the whole marketing strategy (Dimanche 2008; Hardy 2003).

In accordance with Dimanche (2008), Akyıldız et al. (2013:24) argue that it is of critical importance to understand the capacity of events "to create holistic experiences as part of an effective marketing strategy", as event experience should not be considered as merely entertaining: instead, event experience can also build escapist, relaxing, social, nostalgic and emotional experiences by actively involving participants at various levels. Consequently, since experiential environments trigger word-of-mouth, organizations should "have a better understanding of the importance of the experiential features of the events", which are highly synergic marketing tools (Smilansky 2009).

We chose to include events in the first place because we were aware in the early research process that the Routes of the Olive Tree has already conducted a number of events both abroad and in Greece and therefore we wanted to investigate them. Therefore, an elaboration on what kind of events are organized by the Cultural Foundation in order to market the Cultural Route will be made in the analysis.

3.7.3. Social Media

Both Tham et. al, (2013) and Khovanova-Rubicondo et. al, (2011:94) agree that social media are increasingly dominant in the marketing strategies of destinations, being "a digital media space that should be considered with at least the same level of importance as the destination's website itself". Social media are an important tool to consider as they can:

- engage the organization in a continuous dialogue with the customer (Cox et al. 2009; Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011; Leung et al. 2013; Lu and Stepchenkova 2015)
- put potential customers in touch with brand ambassadors and former customers, providing multiple platforms (e.g. blogs, forums, social networks) for WOM (Litvin et al, 2008; Cox et al. 2009; Tham et al. 2013; Lu and Stepchenkova 2015)
- provide a platform for sharing former customers' travel experience, in the form of user-generated content (UGC) in a co-creative way through forums, blogs, media-sharing sites, social bookmarking sites, knowledge-sharing sites and others (Tham et al. 2013; Leung et al. 2013).

In fact, UGC shared on social media include many different formats, which foster faceted informational, sensorial and emotional engagement, e.g. rich narratives, images, audio, and video: "the real experience revealed by real people" (Leung, et al. 2013: 8). Consequently, social media is very different than traditional forms of marketing, since content about the visitor experience, in this case, is generated by the consumer rather than by the marketer (Fernando 2007). In marketing terms, user-generated content (UGC) is effectively a form of consumer to consumer e-marketing (Cox et al, 2009) and is also considered to act as an electronic form of word-of-mouth marketing or eWOM (Buhalis and Law 2008; Cox et al. 2009; Lu and Stepchenkova 2015).Therefore, it can be argued that it is beneficial for organizations to present content submitted by real travelers on social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc.).

Yet, although it has been acknowledged that through eWOM personal aspects are lost due to technology mediation, possibility of misinterpretation is increased and trust is not immediate (Tham et al. 2013; Leung, et al. 2013), credibility of eWOM can be still enhanced by connecting with a vaster amount of different point of views and perspectives and (Tham et. al, 2013, Leung, et al. 2013), consumers can still access to informative and reliable information (Cox et al. 2009) and a trustful relationship can be still established between consumers and managers (Strategic

Direction 2008). However, the 'uncontrollable' factors Verhoef et al. (2009) suggested (eg. negative influence of other consumers) should not be ignored in this case as well. Nevertheless, social media are a valuable tool to exploit, since they portray features that are very important, if not among the core goals of experiential marketing strategies. In our analysis the use the Routes of the Olive Tree makes of social media will be described and discussed.

3.7.4. Internet

While social media are just one of many Internet-based applications that exist on the Web 2.0 platform and that enable organizations users from all over the world to interact, communicate and share experiences (Leung et al. 2013), websites can also provide space for former, actual and potential visitors for interacting and sharing experience evaluations and material, e.g. by implementing social-media apps into their website (Leung et al. 2013; Tham et. al 2013); Websites also facilitate personalization based on specific interests, allowing this way to avoid experience homogenization, all of this while being relatively low cost (Hayes and MacLeod 2006).

For these reasons, Li and Li (2011) have conceptualized a new form of experiential marketing called experiential network-marketing, which is the dynamic integration of experience marketing and marketing through internet. Experiential network-marketing is based on realizing that consumers on internet are both reasonable and emotional and that, during their decision making process, they value experiential and emotional cues which they can get from the websites (Ibid). Gretzel and Fesenmeier (2003) suggest that new technologies would allow marketers to make use of internet as an efficient and cost-effective experiential tool in order to provide vital sensory cues: virtual tours, for example, can engage the prospect tourist in a visual experience which is more powerful and immersing than mere pictures; streaming video, on the other hand, would allow for a mix of visual and auditory aspects of the experience (Ibid).

Apart from the interaction element, websites can also simply play the role of information provider. Both Hardy (2003) and Cox et al. (2009) consider internet as a critical source of information both for visitors on route and in the planning phase of the trip as well as an excellent supporting material across all stages of the traveler's consumption process. It can be therefore a valuable tool to exploit for the pre-experience stage of experience consumption. Hardy (2003) presents the example of "The Cascade Loop" as a route whose website is exemplar in the sense that it provides distances,

drive times, events, FAQs, trip planning tools, accommodations, local businesses and maps as well as a 60 pages paper-based brochure of similar content can be ordered through the website.

Furthermore, Hayes and MacLeod (2006) add that internet is efficient in providing impressions of the route experience, linked with the related themes, while according to Nagy (2012) and Khovanova-Rubicondo et al (2011), the use of internet shows a positive trend particularly among cultural routes target markets: therefore, cultural routes should consider important to develop their website accordingly. On the other hand, Gretzel and Fesenmeier (2003) present a contrasting view, arguing that, although online technologies increasingly afford a multi-layered sensory information to be communicated to users, within the tourism industry websites remain focused on communicating product functional attributes such as price, distances, and room availability, more than experiential features.

In any case, the focus of the use of internet as a marketing tool should be to serve as an informational source for the pre-experience stage (Hardy 2003; Tynan and McKechnie 2009), facilitate interactions and furnish a platform for sharing impressions over the route, while acting, at the same time, as a tool to personalize the experience (Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Tynan and McKechnie 2009; Buhalis and O'Connor 2005). Yet, besides these features, web-based technologies should also be used to deliver an engaging sensorial experience, possibly multi-layered, featuring videos, virtual tours and other innovative implements (Gretzel and Fesenmeier 2003). In the analysis section, the use of internet and web-based technologies in general, if any, from the part of the Routes of the Olive Tree will be reviewed.

4. ANALYSIS

Data coming from our participant observation originally intended to cover the two short itineraries advertised on the website of the Routes of the Olive Tree. Yet, once established the first face-to-face contacts with the personnel of the Routes of the Olive Tree in Kalamata, we were informed that the itineraries intended to cover were slightly different than what they suggest to visitors. Instead, a single itinerary (not advertised on the website and for which a map does not currently exist), which included a number of different towns, villages, archaeological sites and specific tourist attractions, substituted the ones depicted on the website. P2 briefed us with some background information about this itinerary and the related attractions and explained that there are different versions of it that they suggest to visitors (e.g. one-day route trip, two-day route, five-day route etc..) depending on the time available, their age and the means of transportation. Consequently, we had to rearrange the schedule for our participant observation. Fortunately, this did not bring drastic changes in our research, as most of the attractions which we were planning to assess were still part of this itinerary.

Unstructured interviews were collected during participant observation with members of the local community, particularly in Kardamyli, Mystras and Sparta, with Ms. and Mr. Skarpalezos in Stauropigio and with a volunteer of the Routes of the Olive Tree in Ancient Messene. These unstructured interviews were not recorded as they were part of our participant observation, therefore hand-written field notes were taken instead. Semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews were collected in Athens (P1) and Kalamata (P2-P3-P4-P5).
It is necessary to outline the profile of our participants, as our data analysis is constructed on the basis of their statements:

P1: Kazazaki Zoe - Head of the Scientific Committee of the Routes of the Olive Tree
P2: Katsilieri Marinella - Head of Communication of the Routes of the Olive Tree
P3: Karabatos Giorgos - President of the Routes of the Olive Tree and ex-president of the Messinian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
P4: Manager of the travel agency “Trigilidas”, which was described during our first contacts with the route as a key person
P5: Head of the Kalamata Conventions & Visitor Bureau (KCVB). P5 was described during our first contacts with the route as a key person

Before commencing, it is also important to outline specific background information for the better understading of the reader:

- The Kalamata Conventions & Visitors Bureau (KCVB) is run by the Messinian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Its main tasks are to promote the region of Messinia as a business tourism destination and to provide detailed information to tourists who are interested in the 'thematic tourism products' of the region, acting therefore as a visitor center. During our first contacts with the Routes of the Olive Tree, we got the impression that KCVB was described as a key partner of the Routes of the Olive Tree, as P4 was introduced as a 'key-person' to interview. However, there is no such connection. What should be also mentioned is that the creation of KCVB was P3's initiative some years ago when he was still President of the Messenian Chamber.
- The travel agency "Trigilidas Travel", based in Kalamata, is one of "the most advanced travel agency" of the city. We got the same impression that the travel agency is a key partner of the Routes of the Olive Tree; however this travel agency is mostly seen as a competitor by the management of the Routes of the Olive Tree.
- The Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive Oil is a museum located in Sparta, managed by the Cultural Foundation of the Piraeus Bank Group and cofounded by the Greek government and the EU.
- Mystras is a small community of less than 5000 inhabitants, situated in the region of Laconia (a region that borders on the east of the region of Messenia). Its main attraction is the UNESCO archeological site of Mystras, which is composed by the ruins of the ancient Byzantine fortress, palace, churches, monasteries, houses and fortification.
- The site of Ancient Messene is considered a significant ancient city and is constituted by sanctuaries, public buildings, but also imposing fortifications, and houses and tombs and finally a museum.
- The Olive Mill Skarpalezos and the ruins of the olive oil mill and soap factory of Liakea, in Kardamyli are two of the attractions that the Routes of the Olive tree include in the same one-day route.The mill, being 250 years old, is among the two oldest mills in Greece still in operation, while the soap factory has not been functioning since many years.

4.1. The Route Experience

4.1.1. Areas of Experience

To begin with, an interesting question raised by the President of the Routes of the Olive Tree (P3) is *"What is tourism?"* In his words: *"It is an experience"*. As such, everything that surrounds the visitor is part of the tourism experience: *"Everything. From his food, everything, even the oxygen he breaths. This is also an experience"*. P3 is convinced that, as tourism can be conceptualized as an experience, every kind of tourism carries on a distinctive experience: *"It's a different thing to sleep in a house surrounded by orange trees and you breath this, this is an experience, and It's a different thing to sleep in Berlin, for example, in an apartment"*. Experiences, therefore, are acknowledged to be the very source of differentiation within different kinds of tourism (Schmitt 1999; Pine and Gilmore 1999; Lagiewski and Zekan 2006; Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Tynan and McKechnie 2009; Hulten 2011; Feng and Lee 2013). The cultural route, in such framework, propose an "other" tourism, which is, to say, an "other" experience: "*Even those who do social tourism in big hotels, they live experiences. However, the experiences they live are the same over and over again over there. So, they go the first year, they see the buffet, they see the lunch, because everything is all-inclusive, they have big groups etc. you know.* […] *on the other hand, with cultural routes, we are talking about an "other" tourism"*.

P1, P2 and P3 describe many aspects of the Route Experience which would fall in the esthetic area of experience of Pine and Gilmore (1999); also in line with Schmitt (1999) and Lagiewski and Zekan (2006), P2 and P3 particularly stress the importance of achieving a visitor sensorial engagement: *"This is the most important of all and we, through all these actions, should underline this. We should help awaken their senses, this is very important. Very important and it makes the difference"*. Triggering visitor's senses *is "the purpose": "You drag them into this even more, instead of showing them around and then say 'goodbye, thank you for the participation'. And if you make it and trigger their senses you also bring them closer to you, closer to what you feel and experience. I think this is really important. We do our best.* […] *All senses are in motion"*. As specified by P2, and in line with Gentile (2007) and Schmitt's (1999), such sensorial engagement should be holistic, not only visual: *they enter an olive mill, they smell, they listen the sounds the machineries make, they taste different products, they pick up the olives, they touch the branches, they can touch the tree. It's not that they only see it.*

Additionally, P2, like P3, points out the importance of the natural landscape, and the scenic setting of the experience (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Hayes and MacLeod 2006), which is also different case by case: *"The olive tree for the Mediterranean is what the forests are for Canada. The cultural landscape of Canada is its natural landscape. Here, the cultural landscape is the olive tree that grows in the Mediterranean. It is a feature of the cultural landscape. Which was linked to all people of the Mediterranean, all the people of Mediterranean used to have it.* […] *it is a natural landscape that attracts people* […] *that do not have this kind of landscapes and have different kinds of landscapes".* Other than being anything different, sensorial engagement is, then, precisely what visitors want when immersed in a peculiar landscape: "*He wants to see something else, he wants to taste different things and you need to stimulate this.* […] *The journey will be memorable when it will be combined not only with the beautiful landscape but also with local products.* […] *We want the tourist to visit the olive groves, the olive mills, museums about the olive tree, to visit any place that is related to the olive and to taste".*

In P2's opinion, another important aspect of scenic setting, in which the visitors are engaged with their senses, is to help them learning something out of it. She gives various examples to explain this peculiar relationship between esthetic setting and learning. She refers to Ancient Messene ("*Because this landscape, like the one in Ancient Messeni with very old olive trees, shows how the olive tree existed from ancient times. It stays in the visitor's mind that the olive tree existed from ancient times. We want them to have this picture in their minds"*), to orthodox churches ("*It is an opportunity, the church environment, it is a very nice environment to explain the rituals and how olive oil is used in the church"*) as well as to the old soap factory in Kardamyli *("It shows how impressive it is – if you think that in such a tiny place like Kardamyli, there was this important industry in the beginning of 20th century, that is one century ago- it shows how important olive oil production was in the region").*

Education is, therefore, a very important area of the experience (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Poulson and Kale 2004; Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Nagy 2012). As P3 points out*, "education is necessary at all stages* […] *when a tourist comes and visits you, you need to inform them what this is all about. To tell him about the culture of the olive tree of this region, what he needs to be aware of, why this cultural route was created, what is that it makes it different. You need to let them know all these things. So, if what you tell to this person, is also seen, then you have won".*

Educational outcomes are also important for P1: *"People need to learn things, they need to have new experiences, acquire knowledge, and you need to teach that […] so that they will be conscious and educated in regards to what they want to see and taste".* Opportunities for experiences which would fall in the escapism realm, which includes active participation (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Hayes and MacLeod 2006) are also mentioned: "*They do participate. They pick up the olives, they drub the olive trees, they watch how the olive oil comes out in the olive mill. There are different procedures.* […] *They also take it* [the olive oil] *with them".*

Yet, while acknowledging the importance of escapist experiences P2 specifies how such area of experiences alone is not enough. She gives the example of visitors that participate in the picking up of the olives and then are taken to an olive mill, arguing that *this is a half thing for some reason. Well, the tourists that go there, feel nice because for the first time in their life, they see an olive mill, because for the first time in their lives they drub the olive tree and picks the olive tree. But apart from that, do they get anything else? What about all the rest, like understanding the significance for the region and all these?* […] *we try to communicate stories about the olive tree, its culture, its significance.* What the organization tries to do, therefore, is to make sure some important stories are sent to visitors, some that gives the experience "a significance".

We already mentioned how, for P1 and P3, elements of esthetic, such as landscapes and sensorial immersion are critical elements of differentiation. However, for P2 it is the significance of the experience, as well, that differentiates the Route experience, particularly from local competitors, and such significance depends, critically, on the peculiarity of the visitors' learning outcomes. Specifically, P2 describes the travel agency "Trigilidas", based in Kalamata, as a local competitor that, while offering a similar tourism experience regarding the esthetic and escapist aspects, deliver no educational aspects: *he does only one part of it* […] *what he offers is not cultural tourism. It's like a walk.* […] *Because in all these archeological sites that exist around here we explain certain things, why we take them over there, so that they understand the significance and learn something, before leaving. That* [Trigilidas' experience] *is just a walk, for me.*

We had the occasion to personally ask Mr. Trigilidas (P4) about his proposed tourism experience, related with olives and olive oil production. Indeed, he described esthetic and escapist elements very much similar to the above mentioned of the Routes of the Olive Tree: *to give the opportunity to the tourist to see how is the harvest of the olives* […] *It's generally an experience of olive picking, olive harvesting.* […] *we are going to the olive factory, to see how it is the procedure of pressing the olives and how the olive oil comes out of the whole thing.*

Figure 9 'Trigilidas Travel' Experience SOURCE: Trigilidas travel holidays (2016)

Undeniably, despite what stated by P2, an educational aspect is also present in such experience: what P4 wants visitors to experience is *how the Greeks they are doing it.* P4 particularly stresses the importance for the visitors to get educated about the Messinian production, and the superiority of the Messinian, or generally, Greek oil compared to other, foreign competitors: *because the Greek oil is much much better than the Italian olive oil.* The point is therefore to bring visitors to *prefer the oil that come from Messinian groceries*, an aim in line with Schmitt (1999) and precisely ACT strategic experiential modules: a change in lifestyle and consumption pattern, as a consequence of the experience.

On the other hand, P2 gives a different portray of the Routes of the Olive Tree: *We make clear what others have, we make references to other Mediterranean countries, where there is the olive tree. We are not stuck here, Messenia and nothing else and we are the best, no. We say that we have all these, they are unique […] but elsewhere there are other attractions that are unique.* […] *someone who is interested about this topic will come here, then he will visit a cultural route in Italy, then he will go to Morocco. The one completes the other".* The main goal then is to bring enough curiosity, through the Route experience, to bring visitors to explore other Mediterranean countries related with the culture of the olive tree, and enrich their knowledge.

The difference between the two approaches is evident, and it is something P3 also underlines: [Trigilidas travel agency] *attracts groups that would come here and show how olives are picked up, how they drub, and he is doing it by himself and he brings people here*. […]*They* [visitors] *come here in Greece and they* [travel agents like Trigilidas] *are like "Italians, they are stealing our olive oil" etc.* This different focus of the educational outcomes of experience, which can also be seen as a different ACT strategic module (Schmitt 1999), confirmed by P4, is considered by P3 a diffused idea in Greece, which is fundamentally wrong: *Here in Greece all cooperatives, politicians, ministers, all experts are accusing the Italians because they come and take the olive oil, that is loose, they package it and sell it. And I tell them that if there were not the Italians to buy it, we would spill the olive oil. Because we would not be able to sell it.*

From our point of view, a high degree of emotional engagement from both parts was noted, although it must be said that other factors can explain it: for instance various past attempts to cooperate with the travel agency Trigilidas failed. On the other hand we believe that P4's emotional engagement was clearly aimed at pointing out, particularly to the Italian researcher, a specific educational aspect related to the superiority of the Greek oil compared to the Italian oil. In any case, the difference between how the two organizations define the educational aspects of their experience is evident.

Yet, it should be noted that P1 delineates a goal, for the Route of the Olive tree, which is interestingly closer to the one of P4. After the route experience, a visitor should be encouraged to look for Messinian products: *We mostly want him to go back to his country and look for the Messinian olive oil. The Messinian olives. The Messinian raisins.* On the other hand, P1 never mentioned other oil producing countries (such as Italy, Morocco or Spain) in a negative way: on the contrary, many times she specifies that *We want him* [the visitor] *to understand the benefits of the Mediterranean diet and especially of the olive oil, for which there is scientific proof that it* […] *reinforces the human body, they are not harmful such as other products.* The contrast is, then, with a generally unhealthy lifestyle, and the positive contribute that the Mediterranean diet can provide. As we will see, this contrast is very important for the organization to present the Route experience as authentic.

Overall, outcomes of our data confirm that the Routes of the Olive Tree consider their route to be a tourism experience (Jurowski 2009). As explained in the theory section, according to the majority of the literature, experience marketers should assess the different areas of the customer experience as presented in The Experience Realms Model (Pine and Gilmore 1999), considering that an experience that cover all the four areas would be the ideal and the most compelling experience to achieve (Hayes and Macleod 2006, Lagiewski and Zekan 2006).

In that regard, our data presented above shows a different pattern. The model of Pine and Gilmore (1999) is generally capable of describing the areas that different experiences of the Route of the Olive Tree should cover, according to the route designers. But nothing suggest the intention, or aspiration, to cover all the areas of experience at the same time in order to achieve the richest experience (Pine and Gilmore 1999), or a use of the model to build an experience similar to the one proposed by Lagiewski and Zekan (2006). Results are generally more in line with Fiore et al. (2007), as most of the time the Route experiences are composed of different combinations of two or three realms - Esthetic, Escapism and Educational - and peculiar experiences are associated to every attraction. However, this happens for different reasons, such as the significance they give to the realms, and not due to lack of resources as Fiore et al. (2007) argue.

The concept of strategic experiential models (SEMs) as in Schmitt (1999) are also able to describe how the Routes of the Olive Tree uses different areas of experience to market and differentiate itself, particularly in relation with different SENSE and ACT experiential modules. Most importantly, our data shows that, more than covering the highest number possible of areas, experiences are designed according to the synergies occurred from peculiar combinations: esthetic elements, as well as escapist, enhance the educational outcomes, that in turn give a particular significance to the first two, contributing critically in the route's experience differentiation from the competitors. "the meaning of the specific consumption situation" as in Schmitt (1999) is considered very important by the Route of the Olive Tree in differentiating itself from mass tourism, as well as similar offers.

4.1.2.1 Authenticity

Authenticity is an area of primary importance in the Route experience, (Pine and Gilmore 2007): as P2 acknowledges, *"people want something authentic"*. This is because of the associations that

visitors make with the olive tree: *the olive tree is related in their minds with the nature, with something healthy, something authentic, something valuable for our heritage, connected to our history, to our religion.* All these correlations, in which authenticity plays a role, contribute in generating a positive experience: *All these creates for them something positive.*

"Authentic" is associated by P1 as well with something healthy, in contrast with modern mass production: *they are not harmful such as other products, there are no chemicals, they are clean and authentic. The authentic products of the earth, of the Mediterranean*. What is important to point out is how this should be reflected in what visitors get out of the Route educational experience: *We do not want to fool the tourist. We want him to understand the benefits of the Mediterranean diet and especially of the olive oil.*

P3 is also convinced of the critical importance of authenticity in general: *If there is no authenticity, there is nothing. If what you are doing is not authentic, you should not be doing it.* This basic assumption greatly influence the Route experience, as it is intended by the organization. As explained by P2: *In every attraction we include, we try to show something authentic. In what sense? It is something that is valuable, we need to learn about it and love it, so that it's not lost. It is authentic in this sense.* Authenticity is then also connected to something valuable situated in the past, that need to be communicated, loved and perpetuated in the present times.

Alongside the educational outcomes, the organization's idea of authenticity also influences the esthetic realm of the Route experience, as in Pine and Gilmore (1999). For example, the Route organization tries to bring visitors into accommodations which reflect an "authentic" landscape immersion, as opposite to mass tourism and big hotels. As pointed out by P2: *If they stay in one of the big hotels, they do not really understand our way of life. But there are also others who look for accommodation or some place that is more authentic, close to the sea, close to the nature, something like that.*

Similarly, authenticity influences the selection of shops in which visitors can get souvenirs about the route: *We don't want to promote certain shops.* […] *someone can find some truly authentic pieces in the historic center.* […] *There are some shops that sell olive related things, objects that are related to the olive oil, some ceramics, not fake, the original, the ones we use in our kitchens.*

It seems that the concept of an 'object' authenticity, which divide authentic objects from the ones specifically made for visitors, is present in the Route's idea of authenticity, as argued by MacCannell (1973). There are shops in which visitors can find the "authentic" object, the one truly

used by local Messenia people, which the Routes of the Olive Tree focuses on. On the other hand, this is not the only “authentic" souvenirs that the visitor can get, as there are “options”, still authentic, such as modern local art. The point is, to sell differentiated objects from typical mass tourism souvenir shops: *There are also shops, one specific shop,[...] that sells some more particular ceramics, made by modern artists etc. There are options, something they can buy that is authentic. They are not old-fashioned, like the ones we see in Monastiraki, in Athens, for example.*

Authenticity contributes in Route differentiation: not only, as showed above, from classical, mass tourism products, but also from similar products which the Route sees as competitors, such as the olive oil tourism experience staged by the already quoted Trigilidas. With the experience staged by this travel agency, visitors are maybe immersed and practicing something new, in line with Wang (1999) and Cohen (1995), but this is not enough, for the Routes of the Olive Tree, to call that experience “authentic”. The meaning is lacking, the connection with the heritage is lacking, to sum up, what we already addressed when assessing the Educational Realm: “*They do not have the knowledge. […] It’s like a –how to call it- a pseudo-offer. Not the authentic one”.*

In line with the constructivist critique to the concept of authenticity, our findings evidence that the Routes of the Olive Tree constructs a peculiar idea of authenticity that is related with being healthy, valuable, beneficial, meaningful and connected with the roots of the heritage and the modern local culture: this stands in clear opposition to images related with mass tourism and mass production, such as big hotels, classic souvenir shops, and mass-produced products enriched with chemicals. This construction partly reflects what is perceived as a basic need of visitors. As described above, the organization is convinced of the need to provide an authentic experience (Pine and Gilmore 2007) and this influences the construction of the Route experience and its realms, and the Route’s differentiation.

4.2. Theming of the experience

4.2.1. Theme of the Cultural Route

Considering the fact that theming is an activity related to experiential marketing that planners should take into consideration (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Lagiewski and Zekan 2006; Williams 2006; Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011), it is important to analyze how the Routes of the Olive Tree builds and carries a theme throughout the route experience. The

Routes of the Olive Tree, as the name of the Cultural Route also suggests, is a route that, as stated on the official website of the Route, is *"developed around the theme of the olive tree"*. During the interview, P2 invited us to read the informative material they have designed for visitors, where it is actually explained what is meant by *"civilization of the olive tree"*. In one of them, the olive tree is characterized as a *"spectacular tree, beloved and bearing many legends"* and references to the history of the olive tree are made, from the very ancient times, through the Byzantine period, the Ottoman years and the end of the 19th century to the modern times and nowadays. The following few lines are a direct quotation taken from another material, through which visitors can *"get an idea of what is the theme of the cultural routes"*.

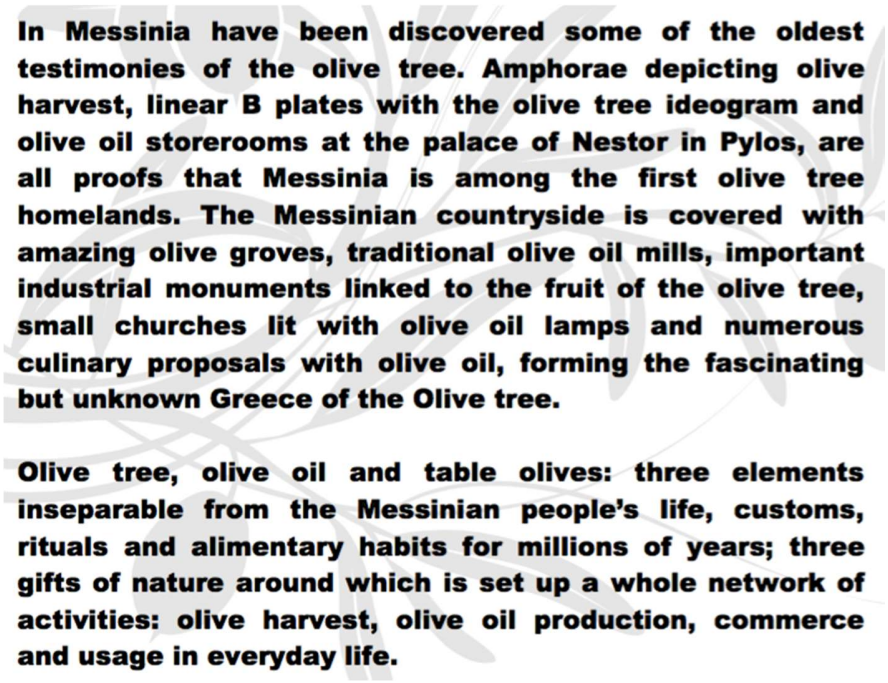


Figure 10 Theme of the Routes of the Olive Tree
SOURCE: Informative material of Cultural Route

However, a discrepancy over the meaning of the word 'theme' was noticed. Although there was general agreement about the denotation of the theme, when asked whether the cultural route has one or several themes, the answer of P1 was: *"Themes, themes that come out of the olive tree"* and subsequently that of P2 was: *"One, one. The central theme is the civilization of the olive tree"*. Nevertheless, their comments were similar, regarding the history, the cultural and natural landscape, the products.

P3 illustrates extensively what the theme of the cultural route is about: *"First of all, once someone hears the word 'olive tree', they connect it to food. It has a nutritional value. So, when they hear 'Kalamata olives', they recognize it. However, the olive tree –how we translate it- is the civilization of the olive tree. And what do we mean by civilization of the olive tree? We mean a civilization that was formed by a very fine –from all perspectives- product, that brought prosperity to the place where it grew. For example, in the Second World War, the regions that survived the hunger etc – or at least they had fewer victims- were those in which there were olives and olive oil. This fact began creating myths, cultures. There have been plenty of recipes, we use it for the babies that are born, to the dead that die, a whole story around this theme. Therefore, this product is unique. There is nothing else like that".*

For P2, the civilization of the olive tree is "*whatever is relevant to the olive tree and was developed and left traces [t]here in the region, how it evolved in time".* Regardless whether activities are related to culture or gastronomy, everything is "*included in one theme and that is the civilization of the olive tree",* as also detected at the official website of the Cultural Route, where subheadings under "Olive tree civilization" about the origins of the olive tree, the olive tree in Greece and in the Mediterranean, the olive oil as well as the Mediterranean diet can be found.

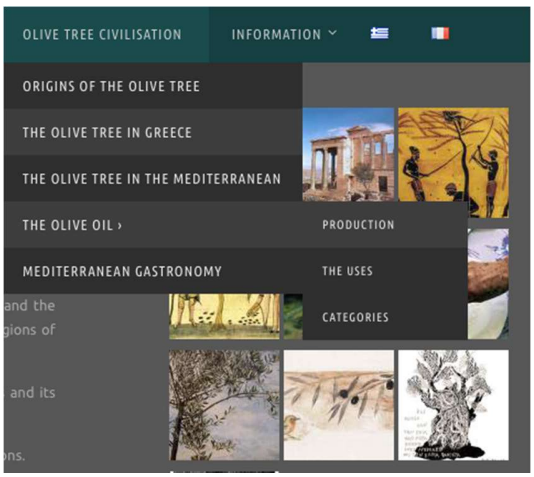


Figure 11 Olive Tree Civilization
SOURCE: Routes of the Olive Tree (2016)

P1 puts extreme emphasis on the food culture as well: "*What is civilization? It is not only the paintings, the art, the sculptures. It is not only that. It is also about what you eat, how you eat it, why you eat it, where you cook it. All all these are culture. Each country has its own civilization when it comes to food, the food culture is part of the olive tree".* Besides, compared to all Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, the Routes of the Olive Tree, according to P2, are *"the most relevant with economy, because they have to do with local products of the primary sector".* This can also be seen on the website:

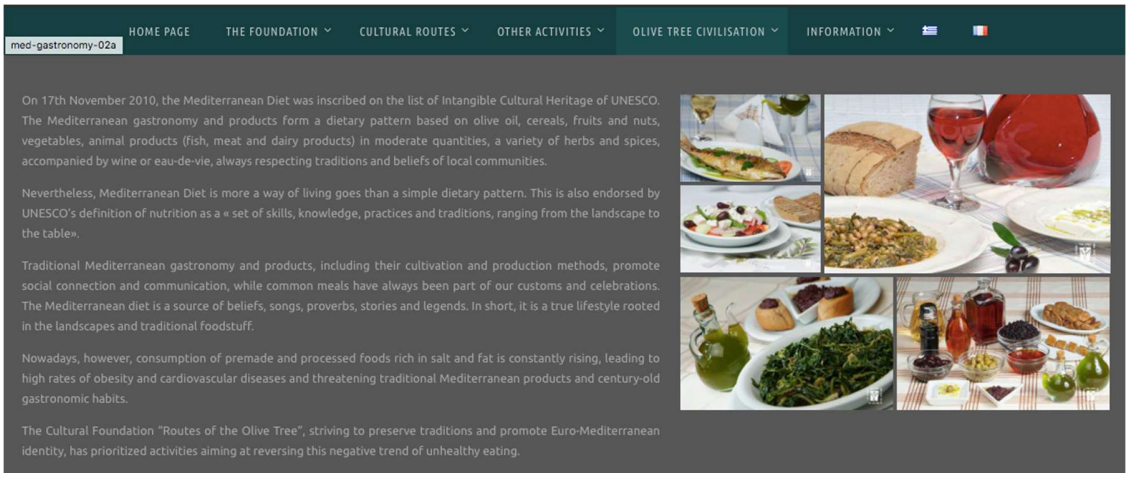


Figure 12 Olive Tree Civilization - Mediterranean Gastronomy SOURCE:Routes of the Olive Tree (2016)

Therefore, the theme is associated to gastronomy as well, since the local economy is dependent on olive trees, olive oil and table olives, *"three elements inseparable from the Messinian people's life, customs, rituals and alimentary habits for millions of years".* As a consequence, the local products are also seen as part of the civilization of the olive tree, and connected to the theme. In fact, the local products are considered to be an integral part of the region and therefore of the theme of Routes of the Olive Tree. P1 compares the route experience to a trip in Russia: "*There is no point to go, for example, to Russia and not taste the local products. The journey will be memorable when it will be combined not only with the beautiful landscape but also with local products. You will eat a borsch for example and it will stick in your memory".*

To sum up, the Routes of the Olive Tree is characterized by a strong and ramified theme, connected with many aspects of history, culture and gastronomy, and well presented on the website. At the same time, one could say that theme is complex and multifaceted, an aspect that can undermine a clear definition of its borders. It will be interesting, consequently, to assess the connection of the theme with the local community and its different interpretation.

4.2.2. Theming and local community

As mentioned in the theory section, a democratic and community-sustainable approach to destination management as well as the involvement of the community members is of outmost importance (Campelo et al. 2014; Wheeler et al. 2011). Our data indicate that this consideration is taken a lot into account by the Routes of the Olive Tree. In particular P3, who gave us the

impression of a great supporter of his region, was talking with strong emotions about the local community. His persistence and passion about the topic made us create the impression that the local community is truly the route's owners and that every aspect of the Route must derive from them and encompass all their values (Wheeler et al. 2011): "*Everything goes around the local interest. All these efforts have to do with the local interest* […] *So, if this need is not derived by the people, then there is no purpose. There might be a cultural route that is interesting for certain people, but it will give nothing to the local community. It will be minor what it will give. The most important is how this thing that you initiate develops and grows bigger, how it moves more people on a local level".* For them, The Routes of the Olive Tree is seen as a "*a tool for regional development"* and *"everything is done for the local community".* Therefore, the common interest and how the locals "want the destination to be perceived" (Wheeler et al. 2011) is set out as the first priority for the development of the region.

The above statements are in accordance with what Campelo et al. (2014) and Wheeler et al. (2011) have argued about the importance of the local community involvement in defining the theme of the destination. To illustrate this better, P3 gives an example: "*I was working as President at the Chamber of Commerce for many years and there was a developmental plan about a certain area for tourism development. The local people, however, did not want tourists over there. They wanted to develop the primary sector. The result? Any investor who wanted to build a hotel, was cursed. Why? Because even if he constructed the resort, the environment was not friendly. And no business can survive if there is an unfriendly environment".* This kind of community sustainability problems reminds of what Chang and Yeoh (1999) and Hendersson (2000) discussed in their studies about Singapore's theming of Chinatown for visitors, which, according to the authors, did not consider a comprehensive involvement of the local community due to an excessively market-oriented approach.

The Routes of the Olive Tree does not seem to face similar issues to the ones outlined above. Instead, the need to engage in a dialogue with the community and take into consideration "*certain needs, ethical needs*" is recognized: "*Because before developing a plan, there is the need to send psychiatrists, sociologists, and psychotherapists to discuss with people. Do the local people want this to happen? Or is it disturbing?".* What he also stresses out is that the Routes of the Olive Tree has been designed neither for the visitors, nor for the sake of the Cultural Foundation; the local community has always been in the center: "*It's not for the tourist. It is wrong to think that a short*

cultural route is done for the tourist. It is not for the tourist. It is for the local community, for the common interest. […] We are not doing this because we like this cultural route. We must understand what are the needs this local community has".

However, the engagement of the local community can be identified as a challenge, because even when local community's needs are taken into great consideration, conflicts may still arise, according to P1: "*All this must be done in cooperation with local bodies and you know how hard it is for the local communities to listen and to set the priorities you want. In a way not to create problems, why did you put this hotel and not mine, why did you put this tavern? You need to set some criteria about what hotels will be included and why. What kind of tavernas will be included and why".* This is in line with the coexistence of different interests, which require negotiations, similarly to what stated by Kalandides (2011). P3 illustrates this issue by narrating an anecdote: "*Once upon a time, there was God, he descended once and he was asking the inhabitants what they wish to have. The one wanted a car, he was writing it down, the other wanted a house etc. So, then he arrives at a village and asks the first inhabitant "What do you wish for?" And he responds "I want that my neighbor's goat dies". And then God says "Don't you want a goat for yourself?" He says "No, I want that my neighbor's goat dies". Do you get my point? This is what we call in Greece 'small village, bad village'".* Therefore, involving every single member of the local community in a moderate and equal way in order to achieve a well-defined theme can be a very challenging matter.

4.2.3. Consistency of theming

What is interesting to investigate is whether the elements are interconnected to each other and whether the theme of the civilization of the olive tree is carried throughout the whole tour experience (Schneider 2004 in Lagiewski and Zekan 2006). According to Lagiewski and Zekan (2006) a memorable experience is determined by a well-designed theme, which informs people what to expect at the destination. However, judging from our own experience, it can be argued that in some cases the theme is perceived as well designed, common and coherent. In other cases, incoherence is present.

Figure 7 Olive grooves in Messenia

For example, the Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive Oil in Sparta is an effective way "*to introduce [visitors] first to this theme"*: *"Then they start seeing outdoors in reality what they saw at the museum, they see real examples".* Indeed, a very noticeable asset of the region is the physical presence of olive trees, which could not pass unobserved by us. As described in one of the informative material, there are 15.863.000 olive trees in the region of Messenia only and the olive trees cover 887,700 acres. In practice, this means that the space olive trees cover in the region is massive. P1 comments on the natural heritage by comparing the olive trees with the Canadian forests: *"The olive tree for the Mediterranean is what the forests are for Canada. The cultural landscape of Canada is its natural landscape. Here, the cultural landscape is the olive tree that grows in the Mediterranean. It is a feature of the cultural landscape".*

Figure 14 Logo of Routes of the Olive Tree

Other attractions, such as restaurants that serve dishes, which are locally based, the Traditional Olive Mill Skarpalezos in Stavropigio, where visitors can experience the way the olive oil is produced, as well as the Palace of Nestor, are directly connected to the theme of the cultural route. The Palace of Nestor is "*an archeological site, directly connected to the theme of the olive tree".* Clay tablets of Linear B script with the ideogram of the olive tree were discovered in this palace in Pylos. It also "*has big jars where they used to put olive oil in the*

old times, big ceramic containers". The reader should note, however, that it was not possible for us to personally assess the Palace of Nestor and its connection with the theme. We could however notice that the logo of the Cultural Routes was inspired by this very old ideogram.

However, since thematization of the route is said to connect all of its attractions (Nagy, 2012), we are also curious in questioning other attractions' connectivity. We noticed that it can be hard for individual visitors, especially non-Greek Orthodox visitors- to make a straightforward connection of the civilization of the olive tree with religious aspects, even though such connection is important for the Routes of the Olive Tree. Unless one is very careful with reading a particular panel at the Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive Oil, which describes how oil lamps and hanging lamps are used in the Greek Orthodox churches, it can be problematic to grasp why churches, monasteries and little chapels can be found along the route.

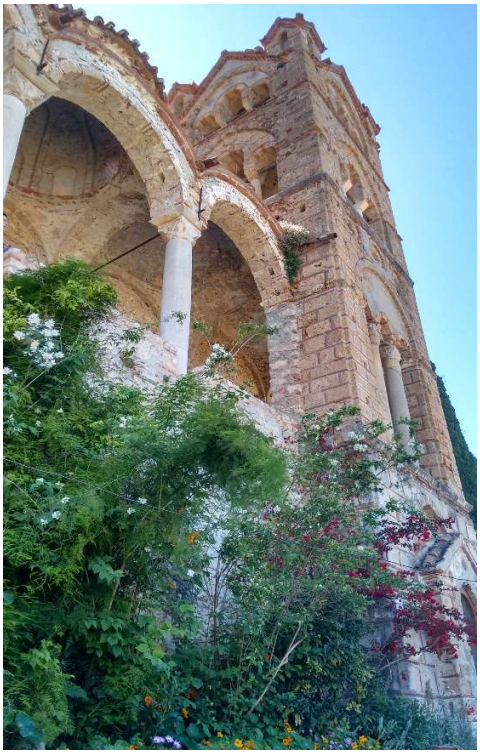


Figure 8 Church in Mystras

Figure 9 Hanging oil lamps inside a church in Mystras

P2 comments on the inclusion of churches in the Cultural Route: *"We give a lot of emphasis on churches, because us the Orthodox people use a lot the olive oil, it's is deeply connected with the culture of the olive tree".* This is the connection which is made between the civilization of the olive tree and the archeological site of Mystras as well: "*Because there are the churches in Mystras […] When the route goes by a very important archeological site, we necessarily stop, because people want to see the site, whether there is a direct connection with the olive tree or not".* However, the actual reason why Mystras "*is really important"* and why they "*cannot just pass by such an important archeological site and not stop"* is because it is *"the only surviving example of Byzantine palace complex in the whole of Greece"*. Therefore,

Figure 17 Panel at Museum of Olive and Greek Olive Oil

in such cases the attractions are *"not directly, but indirectly connected".* Therefore, if visitors are not accompanied with a tour guide or have not read relevant information, it can be a challenging issue for them to understand *"the rituals and how olive oil is used in the church"* and in such cases an incoherent theme may be interpreted by the visitors. We will further elaborate the case of Mystras, as well as other attractions personally assessed by us, in the section "Staging the Route experience" of this analysis.

4.2.4. Different Theme Interpretations

Furthermore, other problems, related to the interpretation of the theme by the local community, can be identified in the case of the Routes of the Olive Tree. While doing the fieldwork, we noticed that not everyone agrees on theming. The structure, goals, vision and mission of different entities, such as of the Regional Unity of Messenia, which operates under the auspices of the Periphery of Peloponnese as well as the Municipality of Kalamata, are not common. Not only there is no agreement on the creation of a unifying, common and coherent theme (Hardy 2003; Nagy 2012; Majdoub 2011), it seems that different mindsets, which influence the image visitors have of the region towards a different kind of tourism than cultural, play a dominant role for the development of the region of Messenia. P2 stresses out the importance of the mentality different people have, not only in promoting one coherent theme over the civilization of the olive tree, but generally in diminishing mass tourism's negative impacts and consequently differentiating Messenia as a destination. The fact that the region is mostly promoted as a summer mass-tourism destination, *"shows the role the different mentalities, that exists in certain areas, play. They are like a brake. They can anyways brake some innovative initiatives. This is really important"*. Therefore, there is no coordination between the Cultural Foundation and the public authorities. P2 is extremely critical towards the actions of the municipality: *"The municipality, although there is a tourism development department, they remain promoting the usual. They distribute a map of Kalamata and keep promoting the usual.* […] *The municipality of Kalamata–without meaning that we have bad relationships- never came to us and said 'Come here, we can discuss how we could promote this thing'".* This kind of discrepancy may cause problems when, according to Kalandides (2011), community members show conflictual ideas that need a clear management. For P2, *"the secret, the key is to motivate people. So, that later they will ask for it, they will talk about the small cultural routes, about thematic tourism. To understand it in order to support it. Otherwise, we stay the*

same". Therefore, not only the Routes of the Olive Tree is not in a position of creating a theme in common with the municipality, but they must they must face, as a consequence of a lack of partnership, different perceptions that visitors have for the region.
Yet, the peculiar nature of the Routes of the Olive Tree must be taken into account. The Routes of the Olive Tree, as a European Cultural Route, is managed by a Cultural Foundation, which is a non-governmental entity that does not have the same degree of power as professional consultants and practitioners who are ultimately responsible for destination strategy design (Kalandides 2011).

Finally, what is interesting to note is that problems may also arise even when there is agreement over general aspects of the theme, such as the olive tree. The different interpretations of the role of the olive tree may evoke conflicts. While for the Cultural Route, the olive tree is perceived as a symbol of intercultural dialogue, for P4 the olive tree is a symbol of patriotism and it evokes competition. What is mostly valued is harvesting as a significant procedure for exclusively the Messinian people. On the other hand, Kalamata Conference and Visitors Center (KCVB) that plays the role of a local visitor center but is however managed by the Messenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, interprets the role of the olive tree from a commercial point of view and values its significance as an economic resource: "*Here we are living by tourism and by the olive tree so we have to promote it".* The value of the olive tree is also seen from a gastronomical perspective, which on the other hand concerns only Kalamata and the commercialization of the local products: *"Because if you go to a country and you don't eat, you don't have the right image of the region I think. If you come to Kalamata and you don't eat Kalamata olive. It's a detail but it is Kalamata olive that you can find only in this region".* Therefore, although the olive tree is indeed unique for everyone and is recognized as *"a characteristic of the region",* the value different local community members give to it is different. It is meant to be a tree which *"carries a great culture"* and unifies people. Yet, the different interpretations are critical, may diversify people and, as a consequence, may result in inconsistencies that may undermine the achievement of a well-designed, well-defined, unifying, common and coherent theme (Lagiewski and Zekan 2006; Williams 2006; Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011; Hardy 2003).
Since, according to our literature, themes have a great influence over the content of the messages that are sent to visitors, as they influence the message design (Sugio, 2005; Hayes and MacLeod, 2006), it is interesting to explore what messages the Routes of the Olive Tree sends.

4.3. The Route's message(s)

We already stated, in the first part of this analysis, that the Routes of the Olive Tree tries to make sure some important stories are sent to visitors, some that give the experience "a significance". The Routes of the Olive Tree is considered to be a route that, through the attractions and activities involved, convey *"the noble messages of the olive tree"*, as also stated on the official website. According to P2, all messages are said to revolve around the theme of the Cultural Route, confirming that the theme should influence the content and the design of messages that are sent to the visitors (Zabbini 2012; Mariotti 2012; Nagy 2012; Sugio 2005; Hayes and MacLeod 2006). The olive tree, which dates back millions of years, *"brings many aspects together"* towards which *"the visitors are very sensitive"*. For P2, the olive tree communicates many different meanings: *It's a tree, and this specific tree –something that does not happen with the orange tree for example- is connected with peace, health, serenity, peace, with Noah's flood, where there was also an olive tree etc. There is great history around this tree, it carries a lot of history and this connection with peace, friendship, serenity etc. play a very big role"*.

Similarly, P3 considers that the Cultural Route "*may convey 1000 messages around the theme of the olive tree"*. Specifically, *"all the history, the symbolism and cultivation of the olive tree and the nutritious value of its products"* are part of the message the Cultural Route wants to convey to visitors, who make these associations *"in their minds"* during the route experience. Quite a few times what *"stays in the visitor's mind"* is specified, especially by P2 and in our opinion this shows that they seem to recognize the importance of interpretation and take into consideration "how visitors interpret the messages that are sent to them" (Mariotti 2012; Hardy 2003; Majdoub 2011).

Furthermore, what these *"1000 messages"* wish to convey is certainly educational elements (Nagy, 2012; Pine and Gilmore 1999; Hardy 2003; Poulsson and Kale 2004), which we already addressed as highly important for the Routes of the Olive Tree. It is pointed out by P3 that, apart from the local community, *"there are also the tourists who need to be educated, in order to understand how they can get to know this product, how they can collect more benefits and experiences. Therefore, education is necessary at all stages of the implementation of a project"*. These educational messages, delivered through the website, the brochures and all material the Routes of the Olive Tree produces, relate not only to historical facts but also information about the olive tree civilization, "awareness-raising", as P3 insists in naming it, about the Mediterranean diet

and numerous facts about the olive tree. Additionally, education is not only considered for them as a highly important element, but to be educational is the goal for the design of the route experience (Nagy 2012): *"The journey cannot be stiff, people need to learn things, they need to have new experiences, acquire knowledge, and you need to teach that to young people so that they will be conscious and educated in regards to what they want to see and taste. You need to teach them that junk food is bad for their health. And the Routes of the Olive Tree must teach that globally, not only in Greece. In whole Europe, this is why they create routes everywhere".*

4.3.1. Identifying visitors and controlling the messages

P3 realizes that one attraction or activity can trigger different images-messages in visitor's minds (Lagiewski and Zekan 2006), depending on the type of visitors, the age group, the direction and, contrary to other participants, he was the only one to refer so extensively to visitor markets: "*Because of the fact that the 'marketing' topic is enormous, the most important is what kind of message you should transfer to the target group you set. Because a short cultural route is addressed to many target groups […] Therefore, every time the message should be adjusted according to the target group you address".*

From the above statement, their acknowledgment of different visitor markets can be notified. We can argue that they are in a position to understand, at least to some extent, the characteristics of different tourism segments: *"[G]astronomic tourism is different, cultural tourism is different, food tourism is different, heritage tourism is different etc.", "There are certain people who search for something specific in gastronomy"*(P3).

Yet, when asked about the kind of visitors who are most likely to receive these messages, the answer was: *"Those who are interested. We cannot say 'We want those ones or those ones', if there is interest".* Although assessing target markets is of vital importance for route planners (Moscardo 2005; Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011; Hardy, 2003), the Cultural Route rather relies on second parties: "*We define it because we have just designed it. However, another person sells it. The one who sells it is in charge of how it should be sold".* What P3 is referring to, here, is the need for cultural routes, in general, to rely on third parts for every operation related with sales, an aspect that was explained during another conversation. As they are a non-profit organization, their capacity to be directly responsible of some sales and marketing operations is limited, as they must not be perceived a for-profit organization. Therefore, the message to visitors, according to P3, *"should necessarily be launched through a network".* But this is quite a big issue, as it also means

that delivery of the message is not totally controllable by the Route: *"And then you must see: Does the tour operator invest on this matter? What does he advertise? How much does he spend?"*.
This is certainly identified as a challenge: as the Route relies on second parts for sales, market analysis, and in general conveying the message of the Route experience to visitors, there is the danger of tour operators delivering different messages, according to their own plans. Although they do not fail to understand appropriate tourism groups (Moscardo 2005), they seem to lack in the capacity to accomplish such activities on their own and over rely on the on the experience of a limited range of industry experts (Ibid). They might not necessarily lack in marketing expertise, however, they consider that tour operators and travel agencies are the bodies most entitled to invest on marketing and promotion.

4.3.2. Messages to the locals and messages to the visitors

Another explanation of Moscardo (2005) for not conducting a market analysis is due to a tendency to identify products and experiences *before* seeking appropriate markets. This is particularly the case with the Routes of the Olive Tree, as this cultural product is meant to be created *"for the local community", "not the tourist"*. This statement caused some misunderstanding between us and P3. We were first asked about the kind of message they want to convey, as the question posed was not clear to whom, the first immediate answer was: *"The message we want to convey is one and it's the most important: intercultural dialogue for sustainable development"*. Later on, he specified that *"the message* [he] *was talking about is for the locals, how they perceive it"*. Therefore, their first priority is to convey the messages of the olive tree to the locals.
However, this brings some contradictions with what was said before about the multiplicity of messages sent to visitors. What causes contradiction is the fact that this one single important message addressed to the local community is also sent to visitors through different channels of communication. *"Intercultural dialogue for sustainable development"* is the primary message that the Route sends through the material they produce, where the Routes of the Olive Tree are always described as *"itineraries of intercultural dialogue"* as well as through their official website. More specifically, words and expressions such as *"intercultural dialogue", "sustainable development", "cooperation", "communication", "create a bridge", "benefit of oil producing regions"* dominate the official website but also all posters designed by the Routes of the Olive Tree. Besides, this one single message is marked on the home page of their official website.

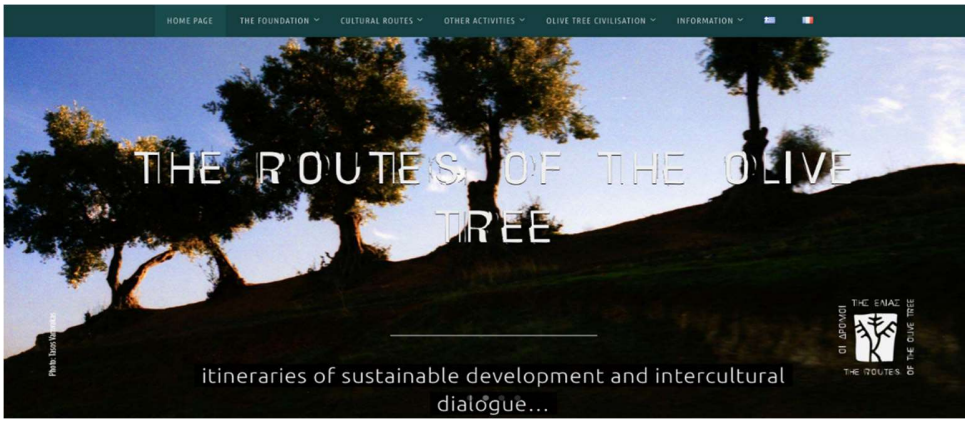


Figure 18 Homepage of website Routes of the Olive Tree

Furthermore, on their official Facebook Page, the Routes of the Olive Tree is described as "*itineraries of culture and dialogue on the olive tree"* and is considered to be "*a 'bridge' from Messenia, Greece to the Mediterranean conveying the messages of the olive tree: wish for communication, cooperation and peaceful coexistence".* Therefore, it is not clear which are exactly these 1000 messages that they want to convey to visitors, as apparently the ones intended to be delivered to the local community are the priority and in some cases they may overlap. This is, indeed, in line with the nature of the Cultural Route, perceived, first, as a "*tool for regional development*" (P3). Consequently, a confusion, in terms of what messages are intended to be delivered to whom, can be distinguished: though the messages intended for the local community and the ones intended for visitors are not necessarily contradicting each other, the firsts focus on the aims and the vision of the Routes of the Olive Tree as a tool for regional development, and the connection with the Route experience, as it should be interpreted by the visitors, is weak.

4.3.3. Messages of different nature

Furthermore, considering the fact that Routes of the Olive Tree operates under the auspices of Council of Europe and receive direct funding whenever possible from the EU, it has the obligation to comply with certain agreements and follow certain rules. Being an NGO, in order to receive funding, they need to host at their premises the Europe Direct Information Center of Kalamata, organize events,

Figure 19 Interiors of the office of the Routes of the Olive Tree

"provide information, advice and guidelines regarding European matters" and distribute brochures and publications on EU policies, activities, projects and initiatives.

However, the consequences of this can be seen in the picture: when we first time entered the office, a multitude of material regarding the EU, the Council, past European projects, and past events of various nature, was immediately noticed. Nothing, among this material, showed any connection with the messages that are intended for the visitors about the Route experience, and in many cases no connection was present with the message for the local community as described before. Indeed, we exchanged a common impression that this was certainly not an office which promotes cultural tourism. This shows that, for reasons of economic sustainability, the control over the messages about the route experience that are sent to visitors, who may visit their office, is affected.

Our outcomes evidenced that there are messages that should guide the interpretation of the Route of the Olive Tree, and their importance is assessed (Mariotti 2012; Hardy 2003; Hayes and MacLeod 2006). These messages are argued to be connected with the theme of the Route, and they would provide educational and behavioral outcomes (Hardy 2003), well exemplified by P3: "*all the history, the symbolism and cultivation of the olive tree and the nutritious value of its products*" and P2: "*this specific tree –something that does not happen with the orange tree for example- is connected with peace, health, serenity, peace"*. Yet, our participants did not show a particular concern for addressing the interpretation of the Route in the pre-consumption phase of the Route experience (Hardy 2003). Most importantly, we detected a series of issues that affect the capacity, for the Route of the Olive Tree, to deliver consistent messages about the Route experience, which range from the necessity to rely on third parts for many functions, such as sales and market analysis, and the overlap of messages of different nature than the visitor Route experience, which affects coherence (Majdoub 2011) and generate confusion.

Nevertheless, the Routes of the Olive Tree produces material of various nature that is aimed at representing the Route experience and assisting in its interpretation (Hayes and Macleod 2006), and this material will be analyzed in the following section.

4.4. Representing the Route experience

In this section we will examine the way the messages that can be sent directly to the visitors are presented through the texts the Routes of the Olive Tree produces, the stories it narrates and the

visual devices it uses both on the informative material given to visitors as well as the official website and the posters designed.

4.4.1. Use of visual devices

Regarding the photographic and illustrative material, the main criterion of selection is the representativeness of the civilization of the olive tree: *"We try to select pictures that last in time, have a certain continuity, to have a duration throughout the years. This is the main criterion. Because as the olive tree has a history in years that has not stopped but it continues, so this is what we want to show through the material we select, therefore, the duration"* (P2). This is clearly noticeable on the material they select collectively along with the Scientific Committee, such as greeting cards, posters, their book about the civilization of the olive tree. Some of the images (figure 20) are historical (black and white) images that represent the civilization of the olive tree and have an atmospheric quality, conveying a more evocative tone (Hayes and MacLeod 2006). Images depicted on the posters, as well as the official website of the Routes of the Olive Tree are mostly related to the olive tree and its history or connote intercultural dialogue (see figure 22) and refer to all symbols that the olive tree represents, such as

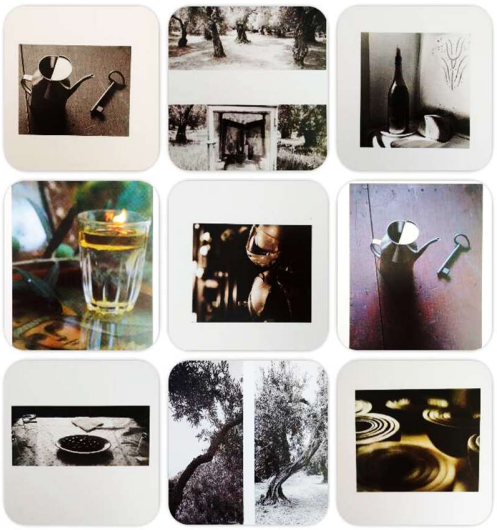


Figure 20 Black and white photographs

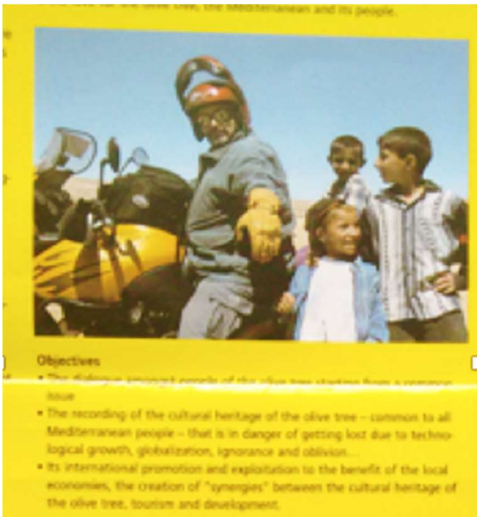


Figure 22 Poster designed by the Routes of the Olive Tree

Figure 21 Example of picture on the website of the Routes of the Olive Tree

cooperation (see the men planting an olive tree together in figure 21). However, there are only a few of such pictures representing people, and it is noticeable that the human element is most of the times absent from the pictures all over the material, and so it is for the attractions of the route and generally the route experience for visitors: there are no pictures of visitors, for example, picking up the olives from an olive tree or walking through an archeological site or just sitting on a table with some locals. Therefore, we noticed that the focus of the visual devices is the representation of the olive tree, but elements such as everyday culture and people, which convey a vivid sense of local culture and create a bond and an evocative mood (Hayes and Macleod 2006) are not combined. We could then argue that no connection between communities, culture and attractions as a socially desirable effect (Csapo and Berki 2008; Nagy 2012) is particularly made.

Figure 23 Informative material given to visitors by the Routes of the Olive Tree

Regarding posters and other informative material, P2 points out: "*We consider that something like this without colors, without pictures has no identity. It is cold, in this sense. We try to put color in our material, we like color in general. People liked very much this poster, for example, that has this strong color".* The reference is made for the yellow poster shown here. The colors, which both Prentice (2001) and Schmitt (1999) emphasized as important elements, are taken into consideration in the case of the poster design, but not in the design of the informative material they produce on their own and through which they communicate *"stories about the olive tree, its culture, its significance".* Although it is stated that they "*consider that pictures are very important, to see something representative, before doing something, to have a picture of what [the visitor] is going to see"* and they try to make the material "*as aesthetically attractive as possible",* in the material which is handed to visitors or sent to them via e-mail in the form of PDF

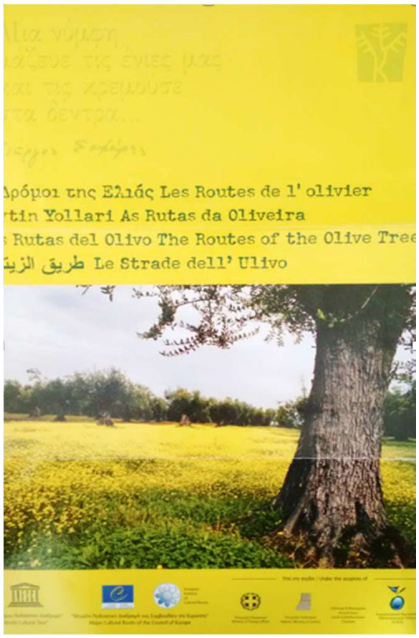


Figure 24 Poster designed for the cultural route

files, there are no representative pictures. These files are entirely made of texts about the itineraries as well as information about the region of Messenia and gastronomy.

However, one important issue is that the design of the illustrative material is in some occasions assigned to third parts, and therefore there is a degree of risk in terms of the messages that are delivered to potential visitors, because they may not represent the values and principles of the Cultural Route. We hereby give the example of an older poster that was designed by a painter who used her own style for the illustrations. P2 recognizes that "there are many problems" in interpreting this poster: *"The letters are small. Then this one is the factory in Kardamyli. For example, when someone sees that, they have no clue what it is. I have told her to put a small label here, so that it's clear to the person who sees it. They see ruins, here they see a person alone. I told her that if there is something that the Routes of the Olive Tree is not, that is a lonely route. Our suggestions mainly include collective activities. And this connotes a lonely person. I get nervous only by thinking about it".*

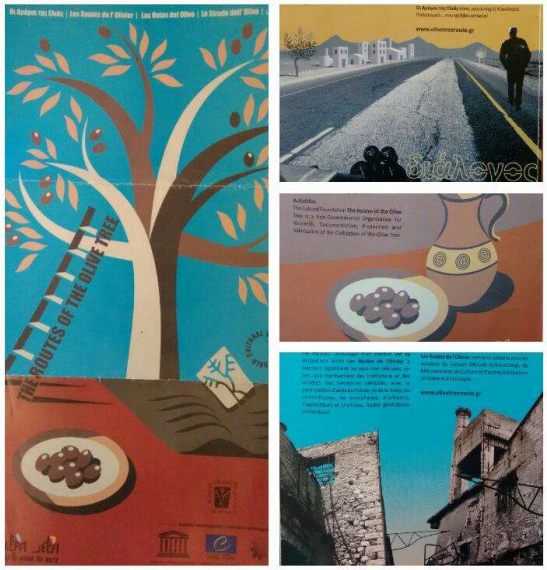


Figure 25 Older poster

In general, they want their material to be *"happier"* and generally *"people love them",* when they design such material by themselves, but this can possibly happen "*only when [they] receive funding. Otherwise, [they] cannot do something like that by [them]selves".* This is in fact one of the greatest challenge they have to face. According to Lagiewski and Zekan (2006), planners should use promotional material that convey specific messages about the Route experience to the visitors. However, what happens when there is not the possibility to produce and use such material? The answer comes from P2: *"We do what we can, because we really struggle to be able to survive as an organization. It is not easy without any funding".*

P3 also comments on the issue: "*In order to have some material, it means that there is someone who pays for this material. There must be someone that pays for this brochure. Who pays? Us? We payed once, when we had some European project and there was some money left, so we did it, like when we print these posters etc. When there is no project, how can we pay? We need a*

sponsor". It becomes obvious that the economic difficulties are many and the material they produce clearly depends on the funding they can receive from the EU: *"When there is no funding we go slowly. […] For example, there is a European project. Can we then move? We would then print documents and brochures. If we don't have, we stop. We won't go to the bank and ask for loans, to deliver this and then not be able to pay back".* This can be identified as a common challenge. As P1 states: "*One the difficulties that the Cultural Routes face is this one. It's the financial support that the states cannot provide to Cultural Routes, to these bodies, these non-profit bodies".*

Consequently, it can be hard for the Routes of the Olive Tree to develop an experiential marketing strategy that corresponds to the message about the route experience they intend to deliver. P2 talked to us with a bitter taste of disappointment about the lack of economic support and it was not very surprising, also given the current difficult political and economic situation of Greece, that we actually heard the phrase *"lack of funding"* quite a few times. What was, however, very interesting was the way the P2 was talking about the printing machine they had recently invested on, in order to produce some *"decent material",* showing that they really value such investment. Although they may not be able to produce countless brochures and other material, the impression we received was that they make an effort to do what they can properly do.

4.4.2. Use of language

With regards to the use of language our data showed that both evocative and rational language (Hayes and MacLeod 2006) is used by the Routes of the Olive Tree. Although the language is, in general, not extremely sophisticated, academic or technical, it is in certain cases, factual (eg. *Livestock-farming in the Prefecture was particularly important in the past and it accounted for about 25% of the agricultural income*) and even distant (e.g. *Its landscape with its particular wild beauty, calls the visitor to climb up to beautiful stone villages, to topple over in the sea, or to hide in olive groves in order to rest*). The use of third person is said to be, according to Hayes and MacLeod (2006), consistent with the use of rational language and should be avoided. However, in other cases or when giving practical directions about the route, they make use of the second person and the language becomes more direct, immediate and inviting (eg. *"If you are unmoved by usual tourist destinations, look for originality or wish to discover different aspects of authentic Greece, just turn to Messenia, a region of the olive tree unknown to many"* or *"After Kitries, going up to*

Doli, you can look behind you and admire the beautiful view of the Messinian gulf and the olive groves"). This type of language is more informal, personal and engaging, therefore, more evocative (Ibid).

Furthermore, use of "experiential" words such as *"discover", "exploration", "discovery", "taste"* which involve a personal, and emotional engagement (Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Zarantonello et al. 2013), as well as romantic references are made. One can identify alluring descriptions of the Cultural Route's assets and visualize a *"picturesque village", "tile roofs", "restored towers", "pebbled coasts", "elegant small hotels" "taverns in courtyards shaded by olive trees", "antiques shops", "fancy little bars", "genuine Mediterranean landscape"*.

Moreover, since one of the Foundation's main goals is to introduce the visitor, who "*wants to taste different things"* to the traditional local products and educate people about the Mediterranean diet, extreme emphasis is put on the tastes and flavors of the various products of the region of Messenia. When references to the products are made, numerous "experiential" expressions (Zarantonello et al. 2013) are used, such as: *"exceptional flavor"*, *"tasty and digestible"*, *"fruity scents, full flavor and live color"*, *"distinguished because of their scent and their flavor"*, *"tasty ancient fruit"*, *"enjoyable flavor"*, *"tasty enjoyments"*, *"distinct flavor"*, *"aromatic plants and herbs", "particular flavor"*, *"full flavor".* Indeed, as already explained, they recognize the value of triggering the visitors' senses: in the moment she was talking about the visitor experience, P2 was using her hands to point her mouth, nose, ears, and eyes. This shows that they recognize the importance of the holistic sensory excitement, related to Schmitt's (1999) SENSE experiential module, and the Routes of the Olive Tree *"should underline this".*

However, the experiential expressions mentioned above are the only references which we identified in their material. It can be generally argued that what is in the center of the experience is not the visitors themselves but rather the olive tree and all the "*important rural products which support the region's economy".* This impression was noticed by the way all our interviewees were talking about the local products.

Additionally, some difference can be identified in the language used in these informative material, which is more immediate and inviting, and the official website of the Routes of the Olive Tree, where the style is more formal and impersonal, as it can be seen from the following abstract:

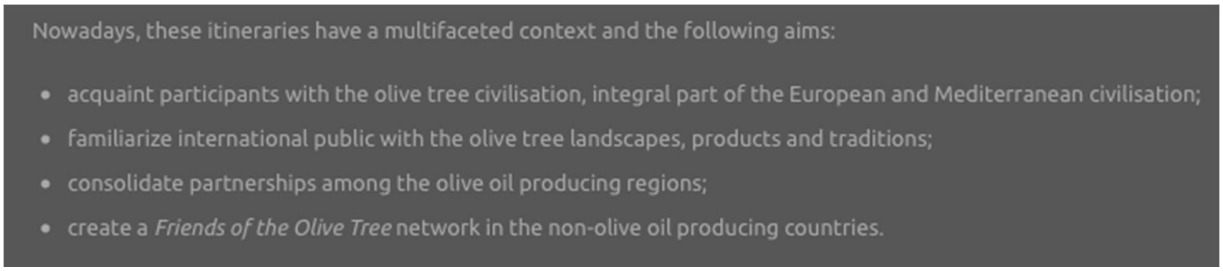


Figure 26 Type of language used on the website of the Routes of the Olive Tree

However, it should be also noted that the webpage is only partly managed by the Cultural Foundation, as there are other enterprises involved in the design and management of the webpage. This can be a potential problem, as the messages one receives from the webpage and from the informative material, both in terms of context and style, are qualitatively different.

4.4.3. Storytelling

Additionally, according to our literature, what planners need to take into account in communicating the route experience is the use of storytelling. The Routes of the Olive Tree supports the use of stories, which are said to be strong and engaging experience-delivery tools (Tussyadiah et al. 2011 in Leung et al. 2013) and act as means to enhance visitor experiences (Mason and O' Mahony 2007). In the case of the Routes of the Olive Tree, all storytelling behind the route is dependent on pre-existing unique historical or architectural connotations (Zabbini 2012).

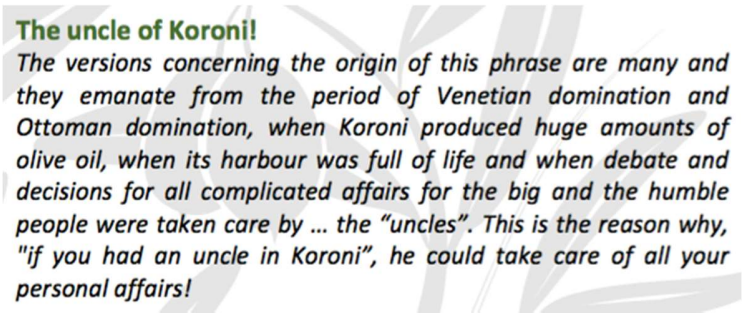


Figure 27 Example of storytelling in the informative material

It is argued by P2 that *"it's very easy to make up scenarios around the olive tree"* and one such example is presented here. It is about "The uncle of Koroni", a compelling story with which one can easily relate to the everyday life of Koroni. However, a difference can be noticed between this kind of story and one found at the official website of the Routes of the Olive Tree. An extract is given below, as an example.

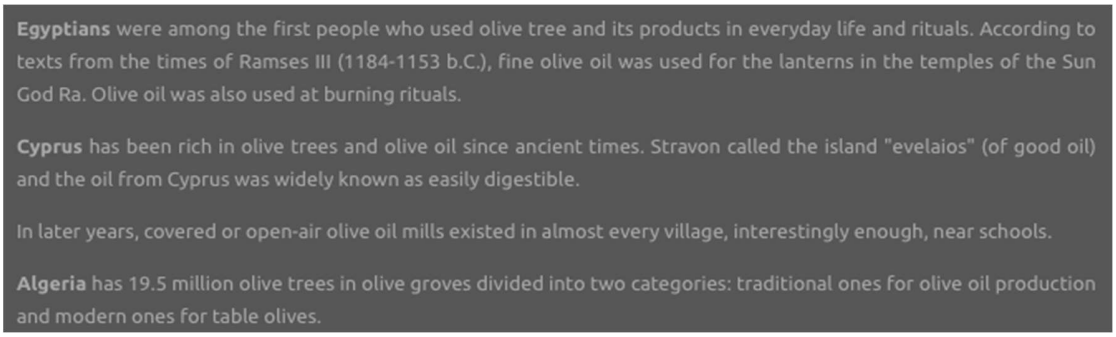


Figure 28 Example of storytelling on the website of the Routes of the Olive Tree

In comparison to the second story, we consider the first story to be more evocative in terms of language. Although the second story evidences that they make use of showcases of the past which are said to be a positive characteristic and should be used in experiential marketing (Hayes and MacLeod, 2006), at the same time excessively didactic language to educate people about the olive tree civilization is applied, by making use of passive voice for example.

At the same time, not many storytelling examples were identified in the data we collected.

Finally, although storytelling is suggested to be widely used by planners, we could note an issue of contradiction, as different stories may be delivered from other attractions of the route (e.g. museums and archeological sites). We hereby provide an example, which is irrelevant with *"the noble messages of the olive tree",* as it includes the narration of a story about Pausanias, a Greek traveler of the 2nd century. This text, which is found on one of the brochures distributed to visitors in Ancient Messene, may possibly illustrate the coexistence of different stories, many of which (as in this case) are not related, or inconsistent, with the theme of the Routes of the Olive Tree.

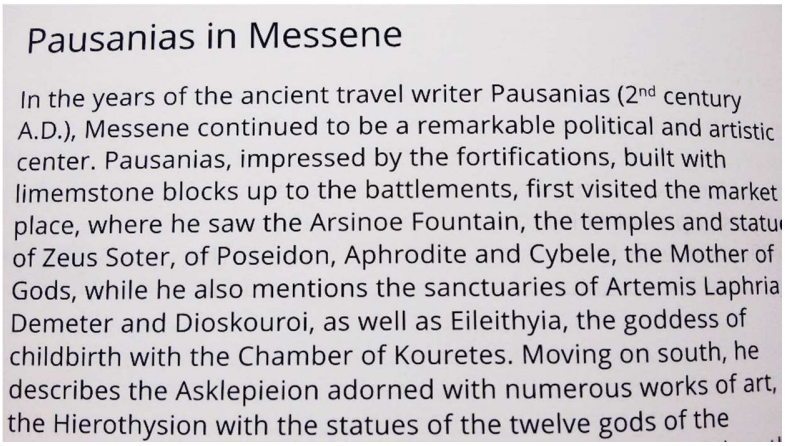


Figure 29 Example of storytelling on brochure from Ancient Messene

4.4.4. Message coherence along the route

Seizing upon what has been said above about the coexistence of different messages, it is also very interesting to consider analyzing whether the messages that are conveyed to visitors, strengthen route coherence (Csapo and Berki 2008; Nagy 2012).

The Routes of the Olive Tree, as already mentioned, consists of abundant attractions such as: natural landscapes, monuments and archeological sites, museums, olive mills, little churches and monasteries, restaurants, souvenir shops etc. Our fieldwork gave us the opportunity to examine the messages that are sent by certain brochures found along the way. What we perceived to be an issue is that the Cultural Foundation does not –and cannot- have the ultimate control of these brochures and, although in some cases one can receive coherent messages, there are other cases when inconsistency is obvious.

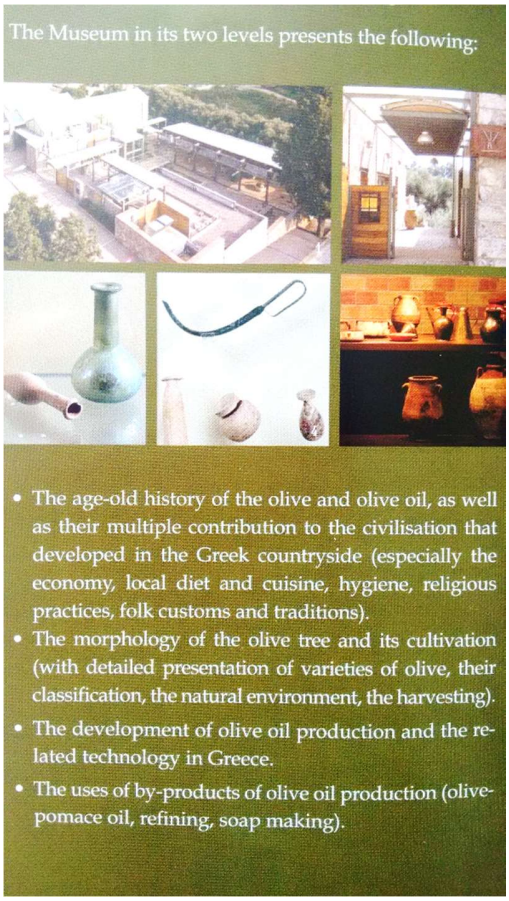
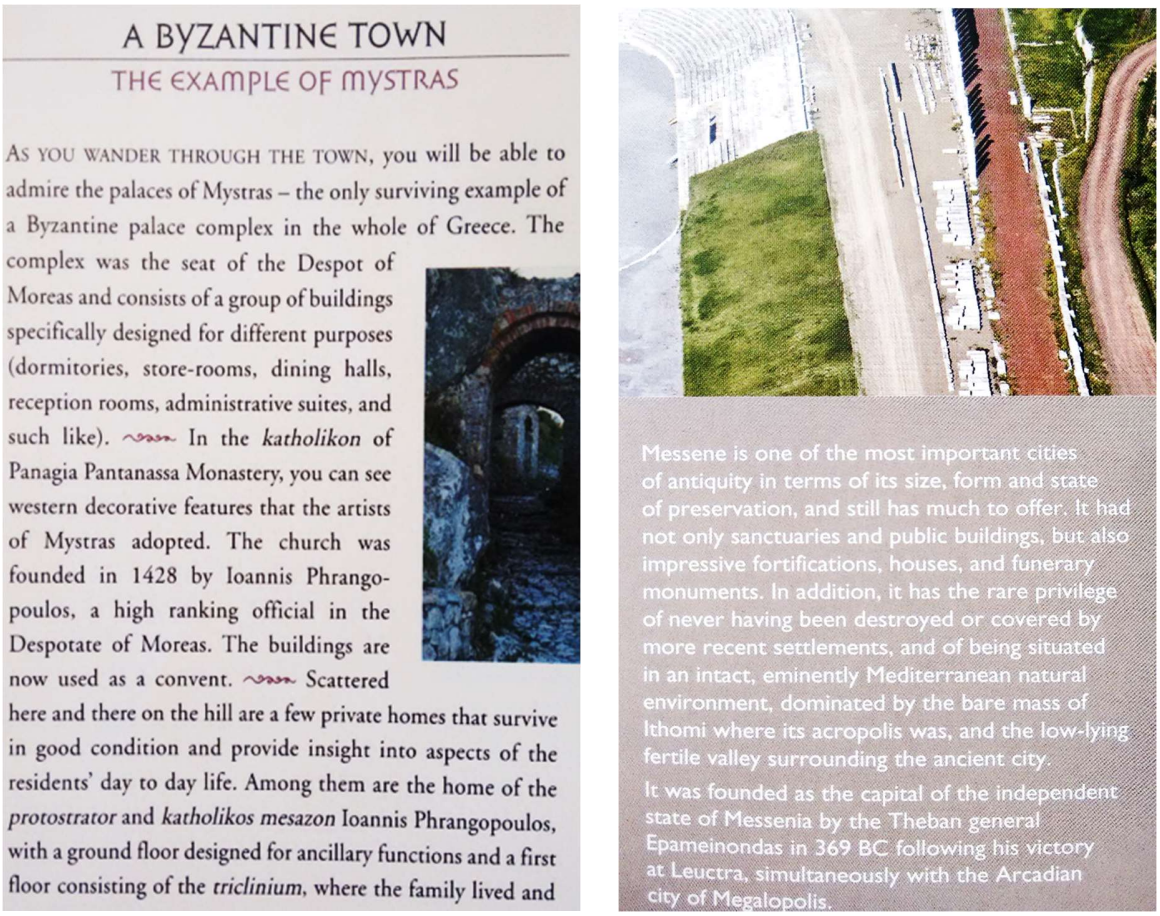


Figure 30 Brochure from the Museum of Olive and Greek Olive Oil

In the case of the Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive Oil, for example, the overall messages that the museum, which is managed by the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation, conveys, are consistent with the theme of the Routes of the Olive Tree. However, this is due to the direct connection and the common goals of the two entities, which is to educate people about the history and use of the olive tree throughout the years. But the linguistic strategies to deliver such education may differ: for instance, the language used in the extensive texts of the panels is rational, mostly formal, impersonal and highly didactic. However, considering other brochures collected from other attractions, such as the archaeological sites of Mystras and Ancient Messene, we can argue that, since there is no direct connection to the theme of the olive tree, as previously argued, the messages that they convey through the brochures are inconsistent with the ones the Foundation tries to convey to visitors. Two examples are given below:



A BYZANTINE TOWN

THE EXAMPLE OF MYSTRAS

AS YOU WANDER THROUGH THE TOWN, you will be able to admire the palaces of Mystras – the only surviving example of a Byzantine palace complex in the whole of Greece. The complex was the seat of the Despot of Moreas and consists of a group of buildings specifically designed for different purposes (dormitories, store-rooms, dining halls, reception rooms, administrative suites, and such like). In the *katholikon* of Panagia Pantanassa Monastery, you can see western decorative features that the artists of Mystras adopted. The church was founded in 1428 by Ioannis Phrangopoulos, a high ranking official in the Despotate of Moreas. The buildings are now used as a convent. Scattered here and there on the hill are a few private homes that survive in good condition and provide insight into aspects of the residents' day to day life. Among them are the home of the *protostrator* and *katholikos mesazon* Ioannis Phrangopoulos, with a ground floor designed for ancillary functions and a first floor consisting of the *triclinium*, where the family lived and

Messene is one of the most important cities of antiquity in terms of its size, form and state of preservation, and still has much to offer. It had not only sanctuaries and public buildings, but also impressive fortifications, houses, and funerary monuments. In addition, it has the rare privilege of never having been destroyed or covered by more recent settlements, and of being situated in an intact, eminently Mediterranean natural environment, dominated by the bare mass of Ithomi where its acropolis was, and the low-lying fertile valley surrounding the ancient city.

It was founded as the capital of the independent state of Messenia by the Theban general Epameinondas in 369 BC following his victory at Leuctra, simultaneously with the Arcadian city of Megalopolis.

Figure 31 On the left, brochure from Mystras. On the right, brochure from Ancient Messene

Other than presenting rational texts (whose style resemble traditional brochures that very extensively refer to the description of the sites, narrate historical facts and point out the significance of the sites, using rational language), the overall meaning of these texts is not in connection with any aspects of the civilization of the olive tree. In the actual brochure of the site of Ancient Messene no references at all are made neither to the olive trees which populate the landscape (which as we will see in the following section are an important aspect of the route experience at that attraction), nor to other aspects of the theme of the Cultural Route. The olive trees are only casually present in some pictures, due to their clear presence on the site. Another example, is the city of Mystras. Although there are references to Byzantine churches and monasteries, no entries are made about the use of the olive oil in the Christian religion.

Hence, although it has been argued that, especially in the context of route tourism, interpretation is argued to be critical in brochures (Mariotti, 2012; Hardy, 2003), such informative material are not produced by the Routes of the Olive Tree and all texts, maps, pictures, the size and colors

chosen are not under their decision, a fact that can challenge and contradict aspects of the theme of the cultural route, since the messages are not connected and do not interact (Schmitt 1999). Therefore, the fact that the Routes of the Olive Tree cannot exercise control on these other tourism organizations may appear to be a big challenge.

Consequently, since these attractions are not directly controlled by the Routes of the Olive Tree, it can be very hard for the cultural route to achieve the ultimate goal which is to convey messages about the route experience that strengthen route coherence (Zabbini, 2012; Sugio 2005; Hayes and MacLeod 2006) and enhance differentiation (Csapo and Berki 2008). This is something that we ourselves experienced while on the field and while reading the panels, as it will be further elaborated in the following section "staging the route experience". Sometimes, messages, for instance, about female costumes from the Byzantine times were sent to us. We argue that it can be even more challenging when the cultural route is followed by individual visitors, because they can exclusively rely on what they read on the brochures and what they see around them and not on an experience that may be mediated, for instance, through a guided walk (Prentice 2001).

4.4.5. Comparison with the material of the visitor centers

We think it is interesting to explore what kind of messages visitors may receive not only when they follow the Cultural Route, but also when they are in Kalamata and receive messages from different sources, such as the visitor centers, which play an important role in depicting the route experience (Hayes and MacLeod 2006). Since there is no particular agreement over the theme of the olive tree, among the Cultural Foundation, KCVB and the local visitor center of the municipality of Kalamata, it is also probable that there is incoherence over the messages these tourism entities convey to visitors. Indeed, KCVB, which is "a body promoting systematically all forms of thematic-alternative tourism".

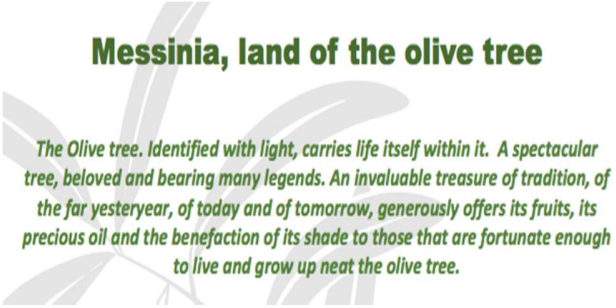


Figure 32 Example of evocative language used in informative material

While the Routes of the Olive Tree refer to Messinia only as the "land of the olive tree", using extremely evocative language, KCVB characterizes it as "a living museum of Greek history", when referring to the historical monuments, as "magic, deep blue waters", when referring to the Messinian Gulf, as "a religious destination" when referring to religious monuments and as the "ideal sports destination", when referring to sports tourism and as the "ideal destination for alternative tourism", when making references to conference tourism, sports tourism, health tourism, marine tourism, ecotourism, religious tourism, gastronomic tourism and cultural tourism. From all informative material, provided by KCVB, there is only one single reference about the Routes of the Olive Tree. Although there is a number of other material, where the visitor can relate to the theme of the Routes of the Olive Tree, such as informative material about some local products (in some cases the texts are even identical when describing the products, probably because of a heritage of the past, as the President of the Routes of the Olive Tree was President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry – under which KCVB operates- for 12 years), It is clear that the goal of KCVB is to promote all the assets of the region of Messenia. However, these type of material show that different messages -irrelevant to the ones the Routes of the Olive wants to

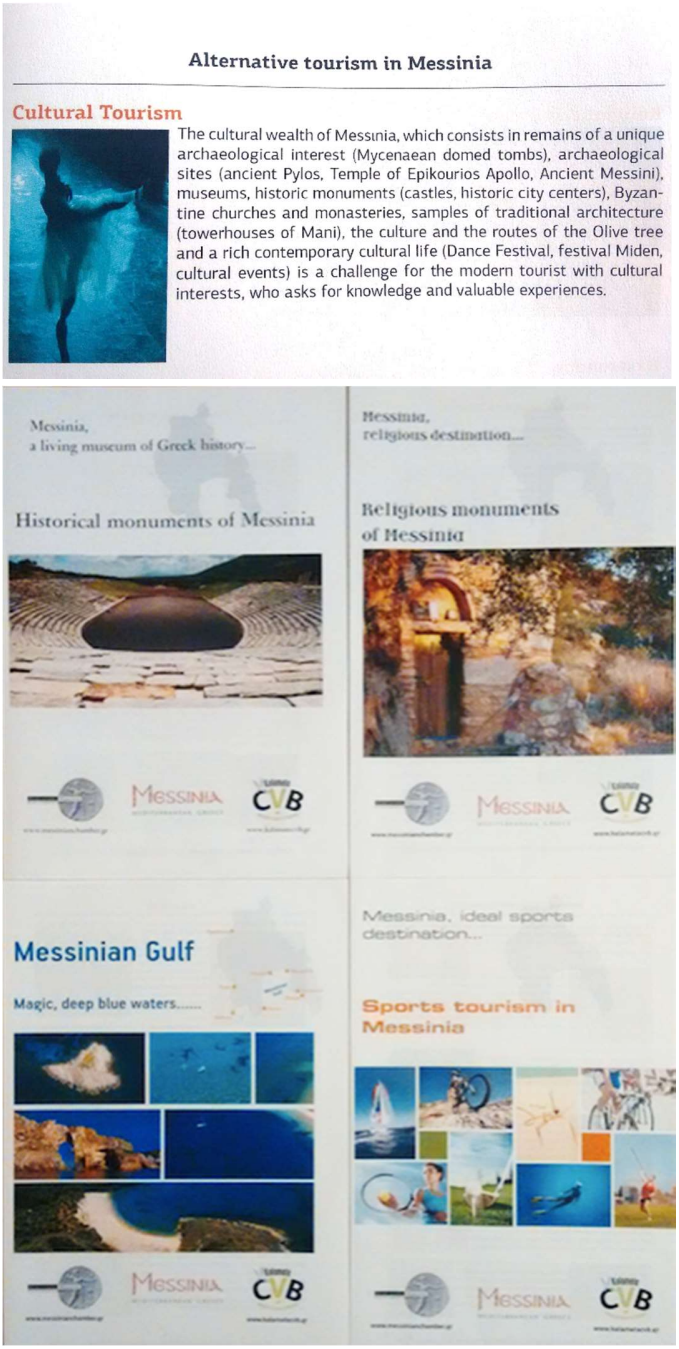


Figure 33 Material provided to visitors by KVCB

convey –coexist and may create inconsistency in the eyes of the visitor. However, this is something that the Routes of the Olive Tree cannot control.

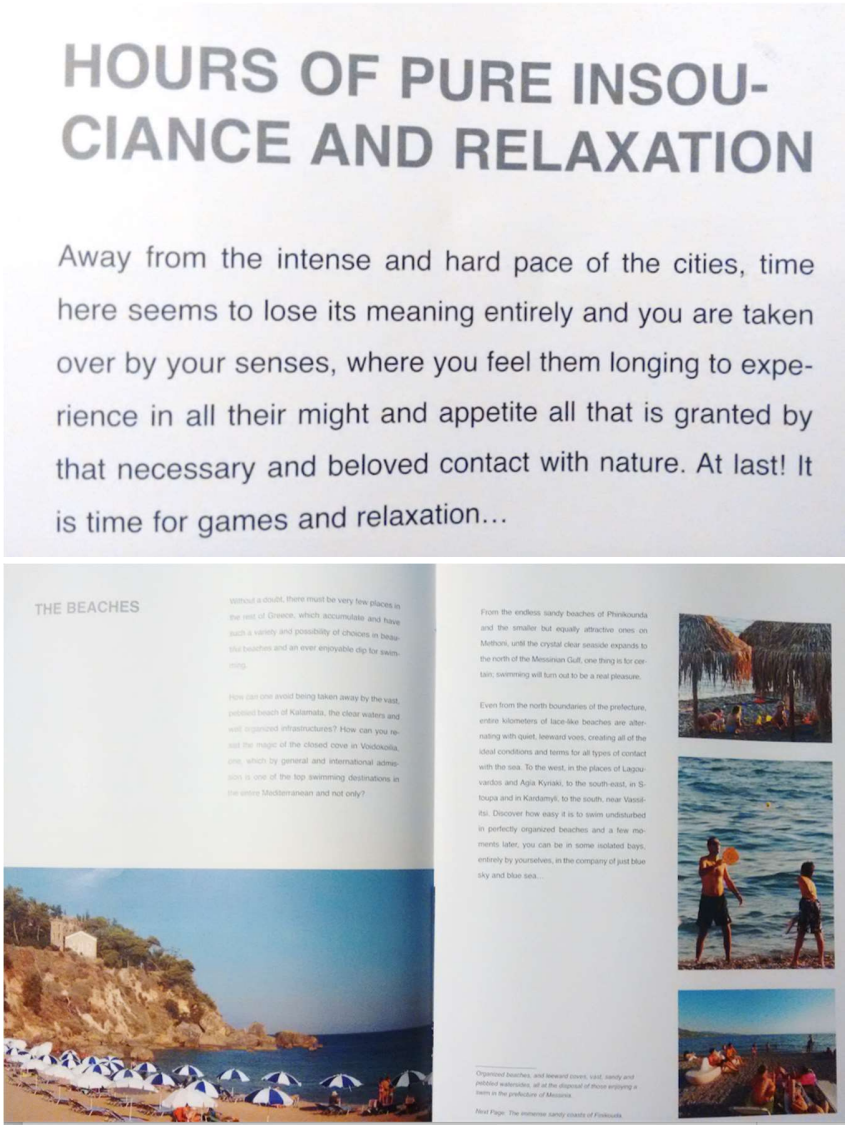


Figure 34 Material provided to visitors by the Visitor Center of the Municipality of Kalamata

In a similar vein, the limited material found at the local visitor center of the municipality of Kalamata may create disparity over the visitors' interpretation of the theme of the Routes of the Olive Tree. The only hints we identified, which can be in a way related to the Cultural Route, are 2 pages over 35, where a short reference to the local products is made. Although the language used through all booklets is entirely evocative (e.g. "the open smile and the small, but always coming from the heart 'kalimera'", "warm and hospitable" "flooded by sounds, aromas and colors") the overall assumption is that the messages are completely incoherent to the theme of the Routes of the Olive Tree. As also P2 argues, *"this message goes to people that ask for it, for massive products. It's not like it triggers people's attention to something more alternative"*. Therefore, the existence of various incoherent messages, not only within the same region of Messenia, but even within the same town of Kalamata, can be argued to be a great challenge that the Routes of the Olive Tree needs to face.

4.5. Staging the Route experience

As explained in the theory section, in staging the destination experience, planners should be careful in making sure that the resources, assets, attractions reflect the theme of the experience (Williams 2006; Fiore et al. 2007). The theme of *the civilization of the olive tree*, which characterizes the Routes of the Olive tree, is recognized to be determinant in designing the route experience. According to P3, "*what we do is to find the products that carry the civilization in them. For these products, we look at the producers, because the product does not interest us as such, we are interested in the person that carries this culture* […]. *So, we find this person and we discuss with them. We look whether their enterprise has the potentials to promote this product, because* […] *what is also interesting is whether this enterprise has the infrastructure to be visited, as a factory, for people to be able to visit and see how this product is made".*

Similarly, as noted by P2: "*Everything has to do with the theme. And if there is anything that is not directly connected, we adjust it so that it is".* Attractions such Nestor's Palace, as well as the churches, are chosen because of their affiliation with the theme, like all the other attractions that will be addressed in this part of the analysis. An analysis of the thematization of the Route has been already previously provided. What it is interesting to assess is, then, how the organization work on the selected resources in order to stage experiences according to the theme and the experiential realms, by connecting them with peculiar tools staged on the destination, providing positive cues and eliminating negative ones (Williams 2006; Fiore et al. 2007; Pine and Gilmore 1999; Hayes and MacLeod 2006). These tools range within display tools, such as signage and informative panels (Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Fiore et al. 2007; Hardy 2003), the involvement of personal interaction with people, either local community members (Fiore et al. 2007), employed personnel (Lagiewski and Zekan 2006) or volunteers (Hayes and MacLeod 2006), informative material, guides and background information (Hayes and MacLeod 2006, Williams 2006) and finally the pre-existing properties of the environment, such as a scenic or historical particular value (Fiore et al. 2007). Additional tools addressed in the literature are: education programs, informal lectures, visitor centers, commentary points (Williams 2006; Hayes and MacLeod 2006).

We had the occasion to personally assess several attractions of the short cultural routes, particularly Route 1 and Route 2. Generally, no education programs or informal lectures are implemented. No additional employed personnel is available on route, except from the management of the

organization, whose sole role is, anyway, to give initial information to visitors in their office in Kalamata.

The Routes of the Olive Tree makes use of local community, volunteers, display tools, background information and is particularly aware of the important role of visitor centers and the pre-existing properties of the attractions, and their value for the route experience. Moreover, a generally unexploited too of experiential engagement of visitors can be identified in commentary points (Hayes and MacLeod 2006): however, we found commentary points, particularly in the form of guest books, to be in place in Mystras, Ancient Messene, the Museum of the Olive and Greek Olive Oil and the Skarpalezou Olive mill.

We already assessed in previous sections (mainly theming and areas of experience) the importance that the Routes of the Olive Tree attributes to landscapes and historical background of the attractions that they implement across the route: the setting of the attraction is considered particularly powerful in triggering sensorial engagement and educational outcomes, which is in line with Fiore et al. (2007). In accordance, what has been already stated before is confirmed in this section. Similarly, the content of the background information available for visitors has already been analyzed. What will be considered in this part of the analysis is, then, the relation of such aspects with what found by us on the field and the other tools implemented: the use of local community, volunteers, display tools and visitors center.

4.5.1. The relationship with local community groups

The relationship between the visitors and the community groups, in particular, is for P3 the backbone of the route experience: "*one visits a region, step by step, a groove, a museum, an ancient theatre, and this and that etc., where there is a house, where there is a lady that welcomes them, who offers him a traditional compote that she has made by herself or where she shows them how she cooks the fried olives, in the pan, where she shows them around and narrates old stories, what happened, who owned this olive tree, how is was developed, how it ended up, how they burnt is but it rekindled. One million things. All this is very interesting by itself".*

It can be seen that members of the local community can introduce the visitors to unique combinations of experiential realms of education, esthetics, and escapism (Williams 2006), as well as conferring validity to the route experience (Hayes and MacLeod 2006). This is clear when P3 describes the visitor experience designed for the Olive Mill Skarpalezou: "*The visitor will go there,*

talk with Christina (Skarpalezou)*, they will visit a mill that was doing what it is doing since a very long time, they will see some traditional things, the way that region is built, how the houses look how is the architecture of the region, the little streets, all these are interesting, how a product is cultivated, how they find it".* If such a thing is not implemented, even a route *"that lacks nothing […] can fail, and very badly. Why? Because local community may not participate. If the local community does not participate, there is no cultural route".*

On the other hand, P2 argues that managing this relationship between visitors and the local community is *"an issue".* These activities are embedded in the everyday life of the local community and therefore there are things that are taken for granted: "*For example, the fact that they gather the olives is part of their lives, it's not something particular. It's something that happens every year, everyone is going to pick up their olives. Or, for example, Nestor's Palace is an important archaeological site in their region. They know this, it's not something new, something that catches their attention. Therefore, they are not that sensible, I mean they do not show much interest about it, neither they are in such position to understand the value that thematic tourism has for their region".*

Indeed, P3 explains how for a cultural route the first challenge to overcome is "*to train the local community, to realize* […] *the advantage they can gain out of this cultural route".* This is recognized to be "*the hardest part"* in designing the route experience. Additionally, P2 underlines how the Routes of the Olive Tree's degree of control of the meeting between visitors and the local community remain, generally, very limited. "*It depends on each person. I cannot answer this. It depends on where they go, where they stay. This is a big issue".*

Our personal fieldwork, particularly in the Olive Mill Skarpalezos of Stavropigio, and the ruins of the oil mill and soap factory of Liakea in the village of Kardamyli, present different evidences in support of both statements.

Whereas group excursions to visit the Skarpalezos Olive Mill organized by other organizations implement a payed guide, The Routes of the Olive Tree does not implement any staging tool besides a short background information of the mill in the informative material provided to visitors visiting the Route 1 ("*take the time to visit the olive press of G. Skarpalezos, one of the last classic olive presses which still use traditional methods for the production of olive oil*").

Though Christina Skarpalezou was not available, her father, now in retirement, offered to guide us to visit the mill. He specified that the enterprise, which exports extra virgin oil in many

countries, does not get any profit from the visitors. As Ms. Skarpalezos explains, *My father showed you around, because he get pleasure out of doing this, I talk to you right now, because I get pleasure of out telling you what my job is about. This is not to make money.* When a visitor going through Route 1 is about to visit them, they simply receive a phone call by the organization. Yet, Mr. Skarpalezos knows P3 in person, and is convinced that the Routes of the Olive Tree is doing a very useful job for the region "*I know Karabatos many years. It was very correct to create this cultural route and it attracted international interest, for the local product, for the olive oil that interests us*", as they are similarly interested in transferring the knowledge about the traditional extra virgin oil production, the qualities of the extra virgin oil and the differences with the mass production techniques *"Seed oil is an industrial product, whereas extra virgin olive oil is a natural product, coming straight from producers and small local olive mills".*

Additionally, while walking to the old olive mill from the oil packaging quarters, the critical contribute of Skarpalezos himself an experiential staging tool for the Route of the Olive Tree became clear to us (Williams 2006, Fiore et al. 2007): once been aware that one of the researchers was of Italian origin, Mr. Skarpalezos immediately related his activity as an oil producer with the Italian colleagues, praising the similarities in the oil production an engaging in a dialogue with both of us. Then, he started discussing the history of the town and indicated its main buildings, as he believes visitors to be very much interested in the history of each region, and its culture, through the production process.

Once arrived at the mill, Mr. Skarpalezos started describing the history of the mill and the production of the oil. Though we visited the mill out of the production season, Mr. Skarpalezos opened the mill and showed us the machineries, the production techniques, and explained the nature of visitors' experience in the oil production. This involves a holistic sensorial engagement (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Schmitt 1999), as visitors experience the noises of the machinery, the smells of the products at various stages; they brake the olives, an act that produce a "*very strong and fruity smell*"; they eat bread, olive oil, olives, and cook fried olives. Visitors also get the knowledge about what they eat.

Figure 35 Mr. Skarpalezos explaining the history of the Mill

According to Ms. Skarpalezou, generally visitors leave having vivid pictures and tastes in their mind.

Overall, we personally qualified the role of Mr. Skarpalezos in the visitor experience in the Olive mill to be in line with what described on the information material and with the Route of the Olive Tree's intents, mostly in regards to educational, escapist and esthetic areas.

On the other hand, our experience at the ruins of the olive oil mill and soap factory of Liakea, in Kardamyli, was not in line with the attraction's prepositions made by the Route. The attraction is briefly described, on the informative material about the Route 1, as a must-see ("*you must absolutely pass by the jetty in order to see the ruins of the old olive press – soap-making workshops, one of the most appreciable industrial building of the entire Peloponnese*") and "*one of the most important monuments in the Olive Tree civilization*". We already mentioned P2's idea of the importance of the site for the Route's theme, and her comments over the building's impressive dimensions, which underline the importance of the building for the city. The Route does not count on any specific volunteer, or member of the local community, on site. Yet, as we asked various members of the community in Kardamyli about the ruins, contradictory indications were provided: no reference was made to the importance of the building for the city and generally the visit at the site was strongly advised against, due to the perceive dangers. Indeed, as the site was not advertised at all, we found it difficult to find, and the access was ultimately forbidden by the local authorities.

Figure 36 Ruins of old Olive mills and soap factory of Liakea, in Kardamyli

The perception of the site in the local community was, therefore, inconsistent with the Route's propositions (a dangerous ruin to avoid, instead of an important and appreciable monument), and

no encounter with the local community could be verified to act as a tool for the route (Fiore et al. 2007). We could personally verify what advised by P2 in this case. The same pattern can be seen across the other attractions personally inspected by us: Mystras and the Ancient Messene.

P2 describes the importance of the site of Mystras, in relation with the theme of the route, according to the visitor's experience: "*one can see the physical presence of the olive tree. You see the olive trees that surround the site, you see churches, very old churches that have these olive oil lamps, the ones that are lit with olive oil. […]. They exist from Byzantine times. So, we show how from that time, the use of the olive oil existed".* We moved to Sparta, the administrative capital of Laconia, from the Route's quarters of Kalamata, to assess the site, using public transports. Before finally reaching the site, we had occasions to talk with members of the local community, including the owner of a small cafè in Mystras who was also selling olive oil of his own production. In all cases the importance and the scenic beauty of the site was acknowledged, but a connection similar to the words of P2 was never evidenced.

In the site of Ancient Messene the lack of connection and consistency between the experience as intended by the Routes of the Olive Tree and the actuality of such was similarly evident. The site is described by P2 as "*one of the most well-preserved ancient cities, and the physical presence of the olive tree is extremely noticeable. There are many groves nearby and so on*. […] *it's very nice as a landscape, because landscapes also play a very important role in the cultural routes.* […]*Because this landscape, like the one in Ancient Messeni with very old olive trees, shows how the olive tree existed from ancient times. It stays in the visitor's mind that the olive tree existed from ancient times. We want them to have this picture in their minds. And this is ideal.* […] *The olive tree? It's one of the most ancient trees".*

The Route can count on a member of the local community in promoting the site and guiding the visitors: this person, a retired woman, lives in the area with her family and, in the words of P2, can be considered to be a volunteer, as described by Hayes and MacLeod (2006): "*She is doing all these to help us because she has free time*". When we assessed personally the site we had the occasion to meet with the volunteer, with whom we discussed the activities of the visitors in the area, though It wasn't unfortunately possible to record the conversation. Interestingly, the volunteer described to us the archeological value of the site, and provided many historical information. Yet, she did not give any information about the olive trees that, in line with what stated by P2, surround the area. When directly asked about the trees, the volunteer just stated that

the remaining trees were probably property of the previous owners of the land in which the site was discovered, and some of them were kept for their scenic value. She also stated that, according to the information in her possess, the trees were not very old. No direct reference was done to the connection between the site and the trees in the areas, or the importance of the tree in the ancient times, as stated by P2.

To conclude, in the majority of the sites personally assessed by us, inconsistencies and incongruences were detected between the experience on site as designed and intended by the Route of the Olive Tree, particularly in connection with the theme of the olive tree, the intended educational outcomes, and the related role of the local community members. In the case of Olive mill Skarpalezos-Marinis, Mr. Skarpalezos's personal contribute in providing positive cues, in relation with the theme, was evident: Skarpalezos was, in fact, a determinant tool for delivering the educational and sensorial stimuli that the organization intends to deliver (Williams 2006; Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Fiore et al. 2007). But in all the other attractions assessed it is unsure whether members of the local community and volunteers can be considered staging tools at all, as their performance was not contributing in reflecting the theme of the route, providing positive cues and countering inconsistencies and incongruences: in fact, we personally assessed how these can be originated by the different local community's interpretations and stances towards the attractions. Concerns expressed by P2 have been widely confirmed, and the use of the local community and volunteers as staging tools is challenging for the Route of the Olive tree.

4.5.2. Display components

We personally assessed the use of display components, on Route 1, Route 2, and in some of the related attractions. The majority of display components detected was composed by signage and informative panels (Hayes and Macleod 2006; Hardy 2003; Fiore et al. 2007). Yet, the use of signage, informative panels and display components directely staged by the Routes of the Olive Tree, both on route and at the attractions, was inexistent, as no panels, signage, or display components of any kind were found.

P2, on the other hand, acknowledges the importance of signages as a display component to implement en route, as their future use is planned, and the organization is not expecting any issue with the municipalities crossed by the routes: "*we will put ,for example, a sign "Cultural Foundation- Routes of the Olive Tree – Skarpalezos olive mill –First stop" along with an arrow.*

[…]*I don't think there will be a problem to put signs. We need to do it. This is important. And the President says that all the time. This one is our identity".*

Although no display tools are directly staged by the Routes of the Olive Tree, informative panels and signage are implemented, independently, in the single attractions. We had the occasion to personally verify that, in particular, at the Olive mill Skarpalezos, Mystras, the Ancient Messene, and the museum of the Olive tree in Sparta.

The Olive mill Skarpalezos advertise itself, on the road, by a signage whose design is visually connected with the theme of the route. The same can be said for the other signage, at the entrance of the mill. Inside, other visual components, mainly historical pictures and product showcases, have been hanged by Skarpalezos on the walls:

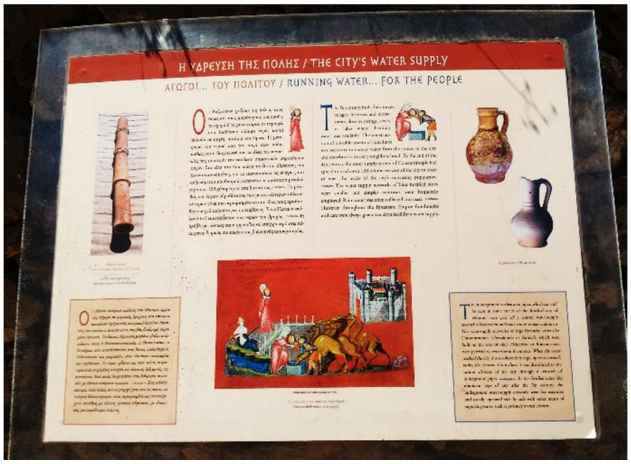
Mr. Skaspalezou incorporates the display tools with explanations and stories personally told by him or Ms. Christina. Other display tools connected with different sensorial engagements are also integrated, such as product showcases. Everything is collected and assembled according to the theme of the olive oil production, particularly, in the words of Mr. Skarpalezou, "*the dynamic of the product* […] *something that nobody focuses on".*

Figure 37 Display tools of various kind at Skarpalezos Olive Mill

Mystras is advertised on the route by signals managed by the municipality, as well as various institutions, including the Greek government, the UNESCO and the EU:

Figure 38 Signage of various kind in Mystras and nearby

Several informative panels can be found inside the heritage site, in correspondence with ruins of particular interest, such as monasteries, houses and public buildings. All panels are related with aspects of the Byzantine society, and various correlations are made with raw and refined matherials in use in the byzantine culture, such as silk and food. Yet, no reference is made to olives and the use of olive oil, which is inconsistent with the role of the site according to the Routes of the Olive Tree: particularly, inside the churches, ritual candles still burn impelled by olive oil, producing a distinct, echoing sound, but no panels or other diplay tool is present to make visitors aware of the use of the oil to burn the candles, providing relevant cues. A small museum of byzantine cultural objects



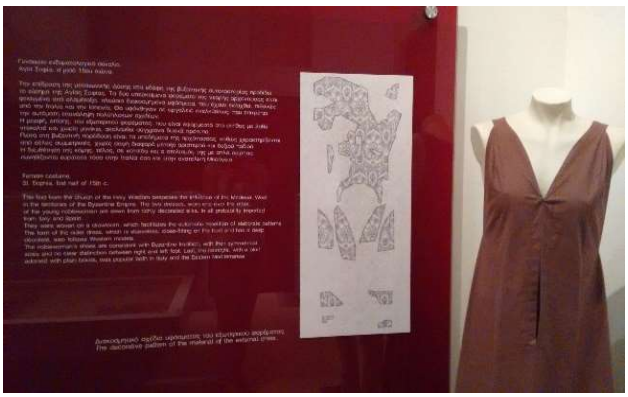


Figure 39 Informative panels in the site of Mystras

inside the site offers informative panels about the use of materials such as silk (as in the picture), but no reference is made to olive oil or olive-related products. None of these display tools present on site is connected, in any way, with the theme of the Route: though there is no trace of inconsistancies with what stated about the site by P2 (other than the fact that there is no trace of a resource which is told to be very important in the Route's interpretation of the attraction), no positive cues are provided that connect the site with the theme and the Route experience.

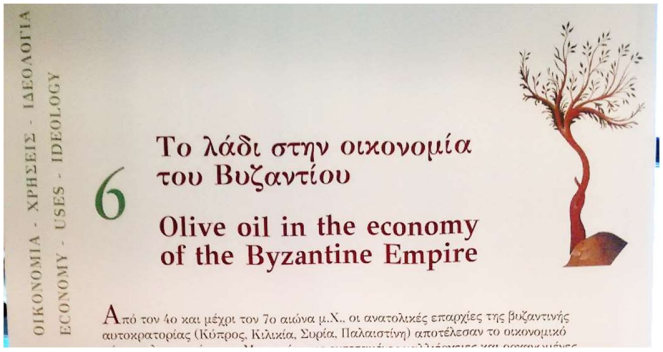
Figure 40 Informative panel in Ancient Messene

Ancient Messne exhibits a very similar situation. Again, the site is advertised on the route by signals managed by the municipality. Various informative panels can be found inside the site and the museum, in correspondence with ruins of particular interest, such as the agora, the temples and the city-state hall. Yet, no panel is related with the theme of olive oil, or the use of olive – related products in the city-state. What stated above about Mystras has been verified by us to be perfectly in line with the experience in Messene. As we already explained before in the analysis, a situation similar to the informative materials in these two attractions can be depicted.

As already explained, P2 clarify that the importance of the Museum of the Olive and the Greek Olive Oil, for the route visitors, is "*to introduce them first to this theme"*.The museum stages, from the entrance, panels and pictures of various kind, related with history and associated with

Figure 41 Informative panels in the Museum of the Olive and the Greek Olive Oil

archeological findings (on the first floor) and on the production process, coupled with samples of machineries (on the ground floor). The connection of the panels with the theme of the Route is evident and immediate, due to the similar aims of the two organizations:



Interestingly, panels explaining the connection between the theme of the Route and the Byzantine society, that were missing in Mystras, are instead present in the museum.

Figure 42 Above, informative panels in the Museum of the Olive and the Greek Olive Oil. Below, use of oil for religion

Of particular interest is, as already mentioned, a panel that explain the importance of the process of burning candles in the olive oil in the Orthodox liturgy.

It is, therefore, confirmed the role and place that the museum has in the schedule of the 7 days Route, as explained above by P2, given the immediate proximity with Mystras: other than acting per se as an attraction and a source of education and sensorial engagement, the display tools staged inside the museum help in building the association with the theme of the olive oil in Mystras, an

association that, as explained above, was missing on the panels staged at the heritage site. On the other hand, as we already argued in our analysis of the theming, it can be hard for visitors, especially non-Greek Orthodox visitors- to make a straightforward association, unless one is very careful with reading such particular panel.

To conclude, informative panels and a number of signage are available along the route as display tools, but as none of them are staged directly by the Route, their capacity to provide positive cues and counter negative (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Williams 2006; Hayes and MacLeod 2006) is different case by case, and so it is for the relation with the theme of the Route.

4.5.3. The role of visitor centers

The role of visitor centers, as positive cues providers for the route (Hayes and Macleod 2006) is particularly acknowledged by the Routes of the Olive Tree. As stated by P2: "*Someone that comes by himself, there is no way that discovers this* [the Route of the Olive tree] *by chance. Someone needs to give him directions. What will the visitors that come here in Kalamata do?"* P2, in particular, mentioned the importance of the local visitor center of the municipality of Kalamata and the Kalamata Convention & Visitors Bureau (KCVB).

The local visitor center in Kalamata, run by the municipality, is said by P2 to be responsible for distributing brochures about Kalamata and the region of Messinia, but, as already assessed in this analysis, their relationship with the Routes of the Olive Tree is far from being optimal. We personally assessed the visitor center. The material available for visitors is limited to some postcards of architectural elements of Kalamata and to some brochures about Messinia. Nothing at the office serves as a positive clue provider (Williams 2006; Hayes and MacLeod 2006) for the theme of the Route. Indeed, as confirmed above by P2, the general, mass-tourism oriented material available in the tourism office promote an interpretation of the region that, in many cases, is inconsistent with the one of the Route. For instance, as previously explained, in the brochures distributed by the visitor center, there is not sufficient reference to the role of the olive oil and the olive tree in the region, historically, economically and culturally. When asked about some information related to the Routes off the Olive Tree, the office's employee confirmed that no material was available.

As we already mentioned previously, there is a history of collaboration between the Routes of the Olive Tree and the KVCB, which relates with the times in which P3 was the president of the former and of the Chamber of Commerce. But, as the presidency of the Chamber changed, the potential of KCVB as a tool in contributing to the route experience, and it possible use by the Routes of the Olive Tree, has been negatively affected, because of different opinions towards the development of the region between the bureau and the Route. As stated by P2: "*When he stopped as President, KCVB and the Chamber followed a different policy.* […] *the next leadership of the Chamber didn't consider KCVB to be that much important. It was their opinion.* Consequently, KCVB *was not able to offer what actually can offer, as a tool for thematic tourism in Messeni".* Nowadays, the relationship with Ms. Paloglou (P5), the current head of KCVB, is mixed: "*we have no problems at all. But, she is not really into it. […] Paloglou is like "What can I say?! Let them visit the website and see by themselves".*

We personally assessed the office of KCVB, the material provided by the Bureau to visitors, and had the occasion to speak personally to P5. Differently from the local visitor center of the municipality, the connection of the bureau with the theme of the Route is noticeable: pictures of olive trees and scenic landscapes with groups of trees are hanged at the entrance, and olive branches are portrayed on the pillows in the waiting area:

Figure 43 Interiors of KCVB office

Particularly interesting is a giant panel in the waiting room, which is directly related with the Routes of the Olive Tree: when asked about it, P5 explain that the panel was placed by P3 when

he was in charge of the KCVB.: "*Mr Karabatos was the president of the Chamber a few years ago.* […] *The Routes of the Olive Tree was under the umbrella of the Messenian Chamber for years. So we were promoting both the initiatives of the Chamber and of the Route. And this one* [the panel] *is left from these years.* […] *we keep it from then because it is an important part of Messinia".* The panel, as well as other decorations and pictures in the waiting room and at the entrance of the Bureau, are for P5 a sign of how the olive tree is an important part of Kalamata and the region of Messenia: *"the most part of Messenia is living for olive.* […] *it is the most important* [asset] *of tourism of the region. Here we are living by tourism and by the olive tree so we have to promote it".* Given that the Bureau is not anymore under the same umbrella as the Routes of the Olive Tree, P5 recognizes that the two entities do not work together like in the past, but they still *"cooperate when there is an event and they ask for our help or to give them information. We are here to help them and it is the same for us. If we need to organize something and we need somebody of the olive trees to be at the event and speak about the products or the initiatives they come we invite them".* This includes, for KCVB, to be available to act as a distribution channel for anything the Routes of the Olive Tree wishes to promote: 2*We promote their initiatives with their name and we just say that 'the Messenian Chamber and KCVB inform you that the Routes of the Olive Tree is organizing that and if you want to participate'* […] *Everything that promotes the region can be promoted by us.* […] *when they prepare something in case they need the help of the Messenian Chamber we are always here to help. The common thing is the promotion of products and the region".*

Figure 44 Panel inside KCVB office

Yet, as already mentioned, KCVB treats all organizations and enterprises of the region in the same way, and see the olive tree only as an economic resource among others, whereas important: *"Here at the Chamber we have 10.000 members. Most of them are people that have enterprises with products. Olive oil, potatoes, and fruits, everything can be found on our site by categories. So we have to promote our products first. Because it is our role here of the chamber of commerce. And*

with products we promote tourism because the travel agencies or rooms to let are also members of the chamber of commerce […] *we are trying here to promote all the forms of truism so we can have forging people all year long. It does not interest us to have tourists for two months, we try to have them all year. With gastronomy with sports with exhibitions".* This consideration is important, because it affects the material that the center gives, spontaneously, to visitors, "*foreign people and to conferences"*. We were given a sample of this material, which is formed by a bag with typical gastronomic products and various informative brochures about the region. The brochures have been already examined before in this analysis, as for the overall connection with the theme of the Route.

To sum up, visitor centers considered by the Routes of the Olive Tree do not play a sensible role in staging the route experience. The visitor center of the municipality is not at the moment collaborating with the Cultural Route, does not display any connection with the theme of the route, neither it diffuse any material that could act as a positive cues' provider (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Williams 2006; Hayes and MacLeod 2006). KCVB is a somewhat different case, as an indirect connection with the theme is visible in the office, but as in the case of the panel, only as a trace of a former relationship. Still, the importance of the olive tree and the related products is acknowledged by the head of the Bureau, whereas in a different way, and most importantly the office is open to consider promoting the material of the Route. Yet, at the moment these opportunities are not sufficiently exploited by the Routes of the Olive Tree and KCVB does not provide any substantial positive cue or other kind of connection with the theme.

4.6. Marketing tools

4.6.1. Word of mouth

Considering the fact that word of mouth (WOM) is thought to be the most powerful marketing tool, as it can turn visitors into brand ambassadors and raise their loyalty (Smilansky, 2009; Carbone and Haeckel 1994; Gentile et al. 2007), it is important to investigate the attitude of the Routes of the Olive Tree towards this subject matter. All participants recognized the fact that WOM is a great means of promotion and can bring more visitors to the region of Messenia. Although it is the most influential source for consumers in order to purchase a product or service (Tham et al. 2013), it is fairly enough for the Routes of the Olive Tree (since they make no profit out of promoting this product) if former visitors can just broadcast a positive WOM. What is most

important for the people of the Cultural Foundation is to provide a pleasant experience in order for visitors *"to remember this and to come back, and to bring other people as well"* (P1). For the Routes of the Olive Tree what is very important is "*whether on that day when the tourist goes out in the morning and returns at night is happy from what he has seen, from the people he met, from what he has tasted […] What he saw is not so important"* (P3). Therefore, the question that matters for them is: "Is the tourist happy?". Because if he is, then the Routes of the Olive Tree will be certainly advertised in a positive way by WOM.

What P3 argues about WOM is in complete accordance with what Tham et al. (2013) and Leung et al. (2013) have stated about former visitors enhancing the credibility and the trustworthiness of an information about a tourism destination.

However it can be also the case that prospective visitors are discouraged, if the former ones they talk to are not satisfied from what they have experienced: "*So, if the things that you tell to this person, are also seen, then you have won. If he does not listen or sees them, he will never come back. And not only that. But also when he goes back to his country, he will discourage 11 more people. He will say ' Don't go over there, it's not worth it*" (P3). WOM might not always be positive, and the result will be a negative impact, as argued by Verhoef et al. (2009) and Murray et al. (2010). Therefore, challenges in achieving a broadcast of positive WOM are also recognized: "*What I am trying to say is that it is very difficult to deliver what we really want to deliver".* Considering the fact that the Routes of the Olive Tree cannot have a big amount of control over what locals say or do to each visitor, a sole positive WOM spread about the Cultural Route can be a challenging fact to achieve: as argued by Verhoef et al. (2009), the customer experience also encompasses the 'uncontrollable' factors, which may result in negative WOM.

4.6.2. Events

Throughout the course of the years, the Cultural Foundation has organized *"quite a few events that have to do with the olive tree, the alimentation, the olive oil, the Mediterranean diet"* (P1). Such events are categorized into three different 'cycles'. As described on the website of the Routes of the Olive Tree , 'Cycle art' consists of exhibitions of painting and artistic photography, projections and children's painting competitions. 'Cycle' entertainment consists of musical bridges with Mediterranean music, quizzes and contests and finally 'cycle' information consists of traditional

product tasting, cooking demonstrations using olive oil, meetings and information days. As the reader may see, opportunities for esthetic, escapist and entertaining experiences are not lacking (Dimanche 2008; Akyıldız et al. 2013). Indeed, these events are believed to stage valuable and engaging experiences (Ibid): "*We symbolically plant an olive tree, with the mayor of the city or some other public person. This is done symbolically. People join. So, there is this outdoor exhibition with banners about the civilization of the olive tree. We usually have a photography exhibition with the theme of the olive tree. An artistic exhibition. There is the plantation and also different tastings.* […] *We just have a stand, we bring our own olive oil, they bring theirs. We have an olive oil tasting, an exchange"* (P2).

Figure 45 Images from various events
Source: AGORA of the Routes of the Olive Tree

Such events are usually organized either in the framework of a long cultural route or on other occasions and their objective is both *"to draw the attention of public, decision-making actors and media"* as well as promote *"the goals of the Cultural Foundation «Routes of the Olive Tree» and at the same time expand its network of partners and friends"*: therefore events are acknowledged to be effective in raising support, drawing attention around the Routes of the Olive Tree aims and goals (Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011). Our participants have affirmed that the goal particularly of events realized during a long cultural route, which are organized either in Mediterranean countries – *"that also have a stake in the civilization of the olive tree"*- or in other European countries – where the olive tree does not grow-, is to promote the short cultural routes and *"to attract tourists, to move them, in order to trigger their attention to visit the actual place"*. Attracting visitors is also what Dimanche (2008) and (Getz, 1997) have asserted to be the outcome of events. P2 seemed satisfied from the outcome of the promotional actions they implement. As she also plays the role of the Head of Communication, she quite a few times denoted the load of

e-mails she receives on a daily basis from visitors who got to know them from the events conducted abroad and are interested in the short cultural routes.

P2 clarified the relevance for these events in connecting with the theme of the Routes of the Olive Tree: *"As we are interested in developing relations and showing them the bonds that tie all these regions* […] *we organize some events so that the local audience can also see the value of the civilization of the olive tree. We also tell them who we are first of all, why we visit them, why we go over there and teach them about the civilization of the olive tree in general and how this can create a bond among the people around the Mediterranean.".* As pointed out by P2, all presentations and exhibitions are performed in the native language of each country they visit (for example, if the event takes place in Turkey, everything is explained in Turkish).

Contrary to what Akyıldız et al. (2013) have suggested, that events should be organized and tailored for specific markets, the events of the Routes of the Olive Tree are always organized in big central squares and address the whole community that lives in that particular region, as the goal is to trigger the attention and to involve as many people as possible.

When speaking about their future plans, events that would implement sales of traditional products are also included. P3 made a lot of references to AGORA which is practically a series of events during the whole of a long cultural route that will be expanded in five main northern European cities, *"with the aim of familiarizing citizens with the Olive Tree in the Mediterranean, an essential part of European culture".* In order to launch these events, the Cultural Foundation cooperates with the Council of Europe, the municipalities of each city as well as with associations but also with local cultural organizations and intends to organize AGORA once every year, starting from May 2017.

The name of this big project also suggests that the events are not restricted to any particular target market: *"It's AGORA, like we used to call it, with the old meaning. Agora, like it was in ancient Greece, where people were gathering and everything was taking place over there. Discussions, speeches, markets, feasts, everything".* Two-way interactions, as also described by Smilansky (2009), which lead to intercultural dialogue is respectively what they aim for.

AGORA, is described at the official website AGORA of the Routes of the Olive Tree, to be *"a feast for the senses, giving the opportunity to every citizen to discover unexploited sides of the Mediterranean Olive tree civilization".*

It can be argued that events as managed by the Cultural Foundation are not considered as merely entertaining but they have the potential to create holistic experiences. Among others, these events show that they can also build esthetic (exhibitions of painting, artistic photography and handicraft items), relaxing (short films projection), social (plantation, demonstrations and cooking courses of Mediterranean cuisine, workshops for children and young people), nostalgic (musical bridges with local Mediterranean rhythms) and emotional (food and wine tastings) experiences by actively involving participants at various levels (Akyıldız et al., 2013). In this sense, and through these events, the audience can "live, breathe and feel" the Routes of the Olive Tree through interactive sensory connections and activities (Smilansky, 2009).

P1 talked extensively about AGORA and even presented to us a few confidential posters with micrographic layouts of 1000m2 squares where the events will take place. He explained to us how this will be set, where the exhibitions will take place, where the local products will be sold etc. Whereas in other events, sales never happen, this will be the first time to include a street market, where *"the customer can enter and buy the product of that producer, so the producer makes money out of this"*.

For the Cultural Foundation, the ultimate goal of these events is, throughout promoting the civilization of the olive tree and the unknown regions, to make visitors travel to these regions enhance the SMEs and contribute in the regional development: *"Because if they do not visit the place, the producers won't be rewarded. For the person who lives in the region to be rewarded, has to imagine that they will gain something out of this"*. It is also specified *"how everything is connected"* and how important both long and short cultural routes are in helping the producers stand out in an increasingly competitive environment: *"This thing* [the short route] *is nothing by itself; you have to tie it with a value, that has to be produced. If a value is not produced, it's all theories about how useful cultural routes are. Everything helps, the thing is how they survive"* (P3).

Yet, a challenge is, again, of economic nature: *"[AGORA] was supposed to start this year, but with all these economic difficulties, with the economic crisis, we could not manage to finalize it, because this is a very demanding project, the equipment, to set it up, to set exhibitions, events and attract audience".* Therefore, the organization and management of such events is not always easy and simple; it is a demanding process and it also takes a lot of time. Nevertheless, the outcome of the events which take place during the long cultural routes is believed to be highly positive,

according to P2: *"People get to know us, they visit our website and then they come to us and ask about other actions"*. Therefore, events have the dynamic to serve as an effective and highly synergic marketing tool (Dimanche 2008; Smilansky, 2009).

4.6.3. Social Media

Although social media have been widely recognized to be increasingly dominant in experiential marketing strategies (Tham et. al, 2013; Khovanova-Rubicondo et. al, 2011; Leung, et al. 2013; Litvin et al. 2008; Buhalis and Law, 2008), the Routes of the Olive Tree has not yet substantially exploited this marketing tool. All participants could understand the significance social media and eWOM play and stated that they already make use of them, as they have *"a great dynamic"* (P2). The Routes of the Olive Tree is present on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and LinkedIn, which however have not been adequately exploited.

Facebook has been found to be the most used amongst them. However, on their official Facebook page, there are absolutely no posts made about either the different experiences a visitors can have in

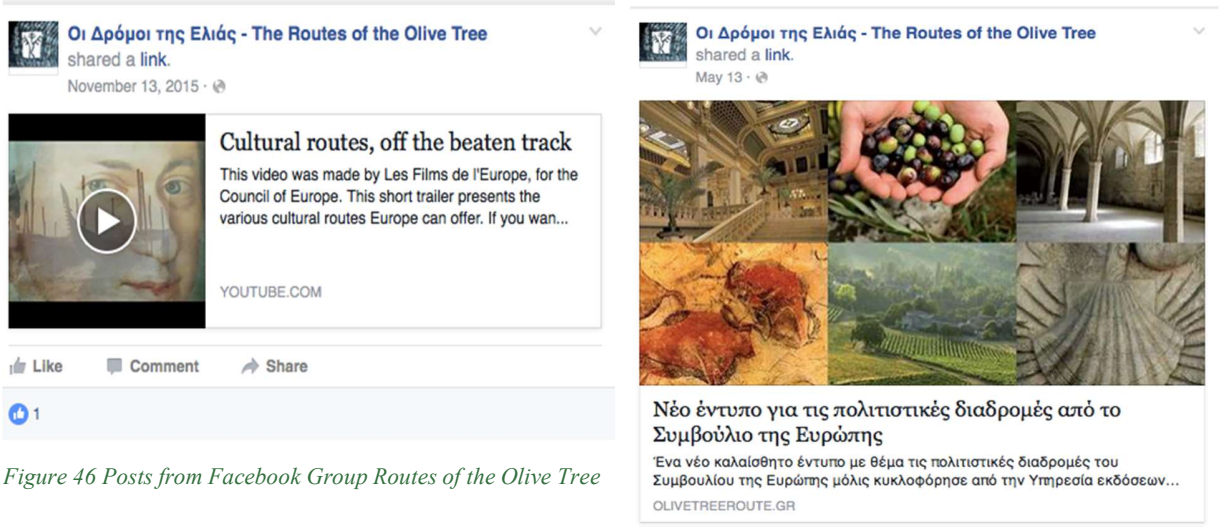


Figure 46 Posts from Facebook Group Routes of the Olive Tree

Messenia or the local products they can possibly taste. The Routes of the Olive Tree mostly share posts of Europe Direct, the European Information Center of Kalamata and almost all uploads are made in Greek (with only a few exceptions, where posts are in English or French). Posts are almost non-existent on Google+ and Twitter (Last post on Twitter on 25/02/2013, five posts on Google+, last post on 27/04/2014), which completely contradicts what P1 stated that *"[they] have some people who help and [they] make use of them very much"*. Considering the rare posts, it is evidenced that they don't really make use of them, and when they do, there is not always consistency over the messages the Routes of the Olive Tree intends to transfer to the public. What is also noticeable is that there is no particular interaction with the users (Tham et. al, 2013; Khovanova-Rubicondo et. al, 2011; Leung, et al., 2013), although it is acknowledged that continuous dialogue is of outmost importance: "*Then everything needs to go online, to create a website, someone needs to be the administrator of the website, the twitter, the Instagram, so that you will have more and more friends. So that people that will visit could write comments or send them, in order to have some quality that will secure that you will have more and more customers"* (P3). From our research, it was also confirmed that no blogs or forums are used to bring potential customers in touch with brand ambassadors and former visitors (Litvin et al. 2008; Tham et. al, 2013), although it is recognized that eWOM is quite powerful and a former visitor can usually trigger the interest of other people by delivering their experience (Tham et. al, 2013, Leung, et al. 2013) through some blog: *"To talk about what impressed him on some website, usually this is how it goes"* (P3).

Furthermore, social media are thought to be an important tool, as former visitors have the possibility to share their travel experiences through forums, blogs, media-sharing sites, social bookmarking sites, knowledge-sharing sites, which constitute examples of user-generated content or UGC platforms (Tham et. al, 2013; Leung, et al. 2013). During our research, we have identified only one video on YouTube, a media-sharing site, of a former traveler, who has shared his own experience with

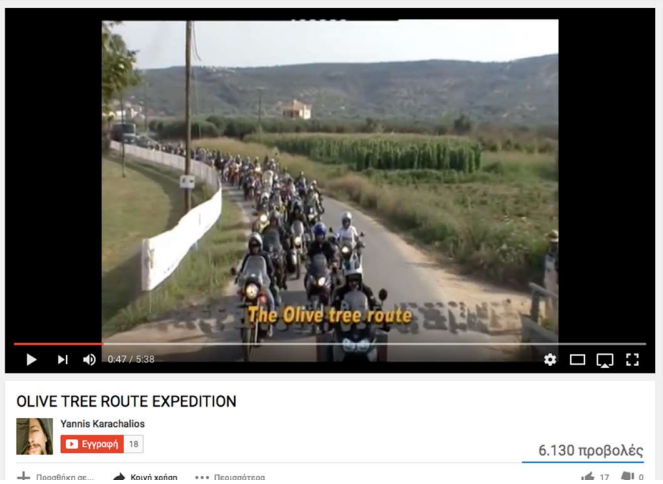


Figure 47 Source: YouTube OLIVE TREE ROUTE EXPEDITION

the Routes of the Olive Tree. However, this particular video was made to promote a past long cultural route. According to our literature, the Routes of the Olive Tree should set the ground for more such opportunities for "real experience revealed by real people" (Leung, et al. 2013: 8) through user-generated content platforms.

Strangely, P2, who also plays the role of the head of communication, could only talk to us about the communication she has with potential visitors via e-mail and not through social media. The main reason for not exploiting social media form her part was that she has *"no time to work on that"*. As she notices, her own job is limited to other tasks: *"They put a lot of emphasis on social media. It is just a part that I do not deal with, because I really have no time. I have 4 different e-mail addresses to check every day. And at this moment, I have not checked anything yet. So you get an idea of what is going on here. And it happens sometimes that I miss something, so it's a bit problematic. But the President puts a great emphasis on social media"*. This also signifies that there is the need to find appropriate people, not *"completely irrelevant"* to manage this job. The need for experts on social media marketing is also stressed by the P3 himself: "*Social media can play a dominant role, especially when there is no much money. Because regions like these that try to develop themselves collectively, usually do not have the funds. Therefore, the only way to communicate is through social media. Then again, this is also a particular science, that has it base in marketing. And then you need experts. Then inclusive economy is needed. To find some people, create this little group and manage this thing called social media"*. Therefore, although social media are greatly appreciated and it is recognized that it is an effective tool that enhances a two-way communication, it can be said that in this case the challenging issue the Routes of the Olive Tree faces is the lack of expertise.

4.6.4. Internet

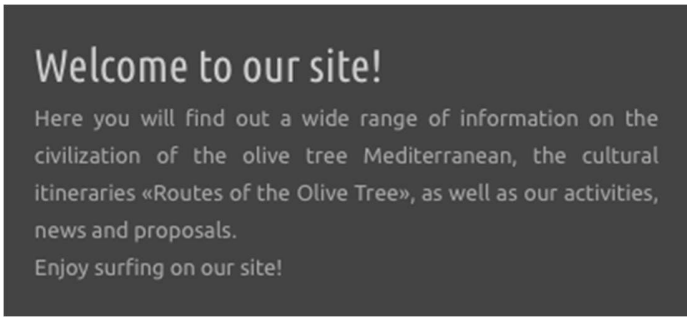


Figure 48 Message from homepage of the website of the Routes of the Olive Tree

It was recognized by all participants that internet is a very useful tool and it is mostly through the official website that a visitor can get informed about the Routes of the Olive Tree: "*They find us by themselves, because we are quite well-known as an organization, we are one of the big Cultural Routes. When we*

organize a long cultural route, we give a lot of publicity. And due to the fact that our brand is 'Cultural Foundation the Routes of the Olive Tree' this stays in their minds and they look for us by themselves via internet. We receive requests every day, either to become members or friends of the Routes of the Olive Tree or to get informed about how they can follow the short cultural routes". This is in accordance with Hardy (2003) and Tynan and McKechnie (2009) state that internet should serve as an informational source for the pre-experience stage. Therefore, their official website is a platform which facilitates interactions between potential visitors and the Routes of the Olive Tree (*"They find out about us through our website and they ask how they could do that etc. We give them some information", "People get to know us, they visit our website and then they come to us and ask about other actions"*).

However, in the case of the Routes of the Olive Tree, the use of internet as an experiential marketing tool does not furnish a platform for sharing impressions over the route, neither it acts as a tool to personalize the experience (Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Tynan and McKechnie 2009; Buhalis and O'Connor 2005). Furthermore, no web-based technologies are used to deliver an engaging sensorial experience, featuring videos, virtual tours and other innovative implements (Gretzel and Fesenmeier 2003). Yet, the Routes of the Olive Tree have implemented social-media apps into their website (Leung, et al. 2013; Tham et. al, 2013) on the left corner, as seen in the picture.

Although their official website is tasteful and well-designed, as suggested by Nagy (2012) and Khovanova-Rubicondo et. al, (2011), what lacks is vital sensory cues (Gretzel and Fesenmeier, 2003) as well as accurate information about the routes. While on the field, we found out that, due to several difficulties, although a complete package already exists, the Foundation has not been able to actually sell the tourism packages directly (or indirectly, through some travel agency or foreign tour operator) to groups of visitors. Yet, potential visitors, can enter the website, check all information available and find out misleading facts about *"1 to 3-day cultural itineraries for groups of 15 persons"*.

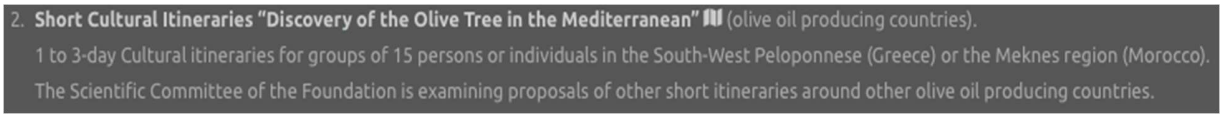


Figure 49 Wrong information detected online about short cultural iteneraries

What definitely may create misunderstandings to visitors (and what also furnished our own pre-understanding of existing short cultural route packages, before conducting the fieldwork) is the following road-maps. These maps are very basic, google-based maps and that particular section about cultural itineraries does not provide any information about the distances, drive times, events, FAQs, trip planning tools, accommodations or local businesses Hardy (2003). What is most important is that that the first two routes (in the West Peloponnese) do not actually reflect the actual routes the Cultural Foundation suggests. This shows that, although there have been visitors visiting the region and following the route individually, no particular attention has been yet put on the pre-consumption phase, which is said to be a significant part of the experience (Hardy, 2003). According to Hardy (2003) and Tynan and McKechnie (2009), internet is an excellent supporting material for visitors, particularly as an information provider, and also a valuable tool to exploit for the pre-experience stage of experience consumption, but this does not seems a priority for the Routes of the Olive Tree, as the information present on the website is outdated. In addition, as reliable information cannot be accessed (Cox et al. 2009), this affects the cultural foundation capacity to establish trustful relationships between them and the consumers (Strategic Direction 2008).

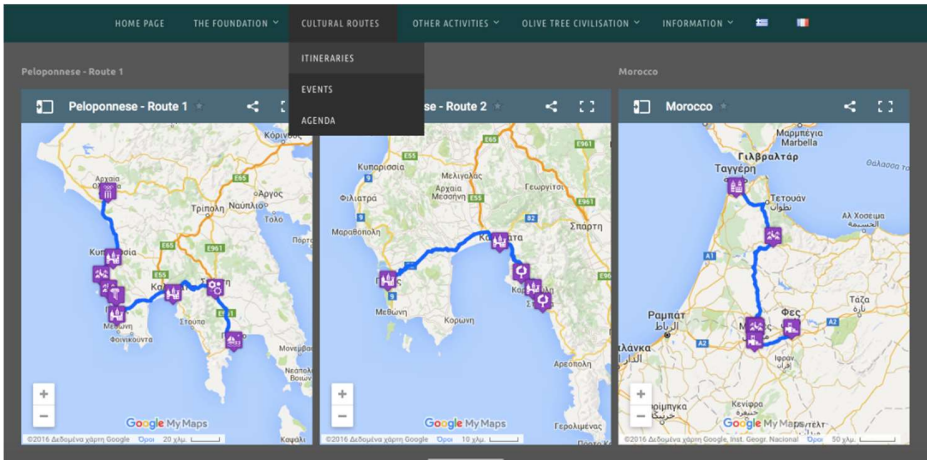


Figure 50 Google – based maps used on the website of the Routes of the Olive Tree

Nevertheless, all participants point out how important it is to use internet and specifically Google as an effective tool ("*if he searches on google about cultural routes", "he needs to search the route on Google and then he can come and visit by himself", "through our website, through Google, he can have all this material", "because he saw this package on Google on the map", "Everything will be uploaded on Google"*). It seems that The Routes of the Olive Tree want to invest on internet as a marketing tool and this is why they have also recently started a cooperation with Google. However, *"it is not advanced because it just started"* and it also *"requires a lot of*

work", which can be challenging given that they lack in expertise and experience with such actions.

4.7. Summary of main findings

4.7.1. The Route Experience

Generally, the Routes of the Olive Tree recognizes the importance of the concept of experience within tourism, to the point that, indeed, tourism is believed to be made of experiences (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Schmitt 1999; Tynan and McKechnie 2009; Hulten 2011; Feng and Lee 2013). The model of Pine and Gilmore (1999) was capable of describing the areas that the Route of the Olive Tree experience covers, according to the route designers. But nothing suggests the intention to cover all the areas of experience at the same time in order to achieve the richest experience (Pine and Gilmore 1999), or a use of the model to build an experience similar to the one proposed by Lagiewski and Zekan (2006). Results are generally more in line with Fiore et al. (2007), as most of the time the Route experiences are composed of different combinations of two or three realms and different combinations (mostly esthetic-educational) are associated to every attraction. However, this happens for different reasons, such as the significance they give to the realms, and not due to lack of resources. Our data shows that the route experience is designed according to the synergies occurred between peculiar combinations: esthetic elements, as well as escapist, enhance the educational outcomes, that in turn give a particular significance to the first two, contributing critically in the route's experience differentiation from the competitors. "The meaning of the specific consumption situation" as in Schmitt (1999) is considered very important by the Routes of the Olive Tree in differentiating itself from mass tourism, as well as similar offers of the local competitors.

Our findings evidence that the Routes of the Olive Tree constructs a peculiar idea of authentic experience, related with being healthy, valuable, beneficial, meaningful and connected with the roots of the local culture: this stands in clear opposition to images related with mass tourism and mass production, such as big hotels, classic souvenir shops, and mass-produced products enriched with chemicals, but also to local competitors, that present similar offers under the esthetic and escapist aspect, but not under the educational aspect. This construction partly reflects what is perceived as a basic need of visitors. Consequently, organization is convinced of the need to

provide an authentic experience (Pine and Gilmore 2007) and this influences the construction of the Route experience and its realms and the Route's differentiation.

4.7.2. Theming the experience

The Routes of the Olive Tree envisions a strong and ramified theme (*the civilization of the olive tree*), connected with aspects of history, culture and gastronomy, and well presented on the route's website theme (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Lagiewski and Zekan 2006; Williams 2006; Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011). At the same time, one could say that theme is complex and multifaceted, an aspect that can undermine a clear definition of its borders.

The theme, as suggested by Mossberg (2007), is an integral part of the Route experience, and it is developed, by the Routes of the Olive Tree, with a peculiar attention to the local community involvement. In partial disagreement with Majdoub (2010), the cultural route itself is meant to be, first, a regional development tool and only secondly an experience for tourism consumption. In this regards, market-driven approaches are refused. Yet, as pointed out by our interviews, the involvement of the local community in the theme is very challenging. Particularly, coherence, and consistency of the theme are challenged at least on three levels:

- A perceived lack of involvement in the theme, by the local municipality that is seen as more interested in promoting traditional forms of tourism, which deliver different themes, related with sun and sea, sport, heritage, religion.
- A strong connection with the theme is built by the presence of the tree throughout all the different itineraries assessed, but we verified a lack of involvement in the theme in many attractions on route (Hardy 2003).
- Different interpretations that emerge out of the baseline on which the theme is built, the olive tree: KCVB, Trigilidas, and the Routes of the Olive Tree, differently from the municipality of Kalamata, agree on the importance of the tree and its culture for the local community, but different, peculiar interpretations bring them to be different, and, in the case of Trigilidas, to be perceived as competitors, which affect their ability to cooperate.

Therefore, though there is a general, and envisioned theme emerging at the destination (Lagiewsky and Zekan 2006), the complex challenge for the Cultural Route is to account for the involvement of the local community and of different attractions, and for the different interpretations that a theme comports.

4.7.3. The message of the route experience and its representation

Our outcomes evidenced that there are messages that should guide the interpretation of the Route of the Olive Tree, and their importance is assessed (Mariotti 2012; Hardy 2003; Hayes and MacLeod 2006). These messages are argued to be connected with the theme of the Route, and they would provide educational and behavioral outcomes (Hardy 2003).

The Routes of the Olive Tree produces material of various nature that is aimed at representing the Route experience and assisting in its interpretation. In line with what stated above, our findings suggest that the main criterion followed for designing brochures and informative materials is the representativeness of the theme of the experience. However, this material was judged only partially experiential: only sparse experiential words and the presence of evocative language are detected, as well as the sporadic use of stories, but this style is not consistent in the majority of the material, and the website deliver, generally, a rational language. In general, the connection between the visitor and the local community, and the representation of the route experience is not clear in the pictures, which are for the most focused on the theme itself.

We detected a series of issues and challenges that affect the capacity, for the Route of the Olive Tree, to deliver consistent messages about the Route experience, as it follows:

- The necessity to rely on third parts for many functions, such as sales and market analysis, and the design of parts of the material, which bring to a lack of direct control over the communication of the route experience.
- The overlap of messages of different nature than the visitor's route experience (the ones addressed to the local community, and the ones that the Route represent for funding reasons), which affects coherence (Majdoub 2010) and generate confusion.
- The visitor's interpretation of the route is generally highly affected by inconsistent representations coming from the different attractions, which are not developed in accordance with the theme of the route or the route experience.

4.7.4. Staging the experience

The Routes of the Olive Tree makes use of local community, volunteers and background information and is particularly aware of the important role of visitor centers, display tools such as signage, and the pre-existing properties of the attractions, and their value for the route experience.

The setting of the attraction is considered particularly powerful in triggering sensorial engagement and educational outcomes, which is in line with Fiore et al. (2007).

The Routes of the Olive Tree counts on the local community to introduce the visitors to differentiated combinations of experiential realms of education, esthetics, and escapism (Williams 2006), as well as to confer validity to the route experience (Hayes and MacLeod 2006). Yet, inconsistencies were detected, particularly in connection with the theme, the intended educational outcomes, and the related role of the local community members, as their performance was not, for the most, reflecting the theme, providing positive cues and countering inconsistencies and incongruences: in fact, we personally assessed how these can be originated by the different local community's interpretations and stances towards the attractions.

Informative panels and a number of signage are available along the route as display tools, but as none of them are staged directly by the Route, their capacity to provide positive cues and counter negative (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Williams 2006; Hayes and MacLeod 2006) is different case by case, and so it is for the relation with the theme of the Route.

Visitor centers do not play a sensible role in staging the route experience. The visitor center of the municipality does not collaborate with the Cultural Route, does not display any connection with the theme, neither it diffuses any material that could act as a positive cues' provider (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Williams 2006; Hayes and MacLeod 2006). Regarding KCVB, display tools of the Routes of the Olive Tree, or indirectly related with the team, are left only as traces of a former partnership. The office is open to consider promoting the material of the Route, but these opportunities are not sufficiently exploited by the Routes of the Olive Tree and KCVB does not provide any substantial positive cue.

4.7.5. Marketing tools

If a goal of marketing strategies based on experiences is to develop marketing tools which embrace two-way interactions (Smilansky 2009), while also exploiting the use of information and communication technologies (Schmitt 1999; Tynan and McKechnie 2009) the capacity of social media and internet to act as marketing tools for the route experience has been recognized as underdeveloped. They do not contribute in engaging the Route in a dialogue with the customer, with the sole exception of the website that is said to bring visitors to contact the Route via email, which is considered by the Route of the Olive Trees as a way to dialogue with prospect visitors.

Social media do not have the capacity to put potential customers in touch with brand ambassadors and former customers, or to provide multiple platforms for eWOM and UGC and are not used to promote the Route experience at all. The website of the Route, similarly, does not provide reliable information for the pre-experience stage (Hardy 2003; Tynan and McKechnie 2009; Cox et al. 2009), it does not act a platform for sharing impressions over the route experience, neither it gives the means to personalize the experience allowing this way to avoid experience homogenization (Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Tynan and McKechnie 2009; Buhalis and O'Connor 2005). Additionally, as already stated, the website provides pictures and information connected with the theme of the route, but nothing related with the route experience, as intended by Gretzel and Fesenmeier (2003). Alhough according to Nagy (2012) and Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. (2011) cultural routes should consider important to develop their website according to the new market trend, the Routes of the Olive Tree does not consider it a priority, because addressing target markets, generally, a priority, or something the management of the Routes of the Olive Tree believe is possible to do, given their status as local non-profit organization. Generally, issues relate with lack of expertise and resources, which do not allow the implementation of experiential strategies around the tools as intended by the literature.

Events, on the other hand, act as a very significant marketing tool for the Routes of the Olive Tree. They feature multifaceted experiences and in many occasions two-way interactions with the attendants (Smilansky 2009; Akyıldız et al. 2013; Dimanche 2008), which generates support and advocacy (Smilansky 2009; Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011). Differently from social media and internet, in this case the management has lot of expertise, and, generally, events are perceived to be successful experiential tools. Yet, again, they are not tailored on specific target markets (Akyıldız et al. 2013), as, as already explained, this is not the aim of the cultural route. As usual, a great challenge in the use of events is the lack of funding.

Finally, the literature underlines how WOM is considered as the most important marketing tool for communicating and marketing experiences (Smilansky 2009; Tham et al. 2013: 146; Cox et al. 2009): the Routes of the Olive tree generally acknowledges the primary importance of such tool, but they do not perceive they can control the visitors experience to the point they only broadcast positive WOM, and therefore they believe WOM to act both in favor and against the Routes of the Olive Tree (Verhoef et al. 2009), as a satisfied visitor can engage new prospect visitors as much

as a dissatisfied visitor can discourage them. Yet, they do not make any noticeable effort in broadcasting positive WOM (Leung et al. 2013; Smilansky 2009).

4.8. The use of experiences to differentiate the Routes of the Olive Tree

This case study shows that the Routes of the Olive Tree, indeed, values esthetic and educational aspects of the visitor experience. These aspects are designed to be synergic with each other, in order to deliver a specific experience significance. This significance, in turn, is enclosed in a well-envisioned, but complex theme, which attempts to connect all the attractions that are part of the Route. Being placed in an environment in which different kinds of tourism exploit the cultural and natural landscape, the Routes of the Olive Tree proposes to the visitor an experience of famous attractions such as Mystras, Ancient Messene and generally the entire regions covered by the route, which is lived through the lens of the theme: it involves specific natural and cultural landscapes, sensorial inputs and learning outcomes. For instance, in Ancient Messene, the route experience would bring the visitor to being immersed in the continuity of the civilization of the olive tree from the ancient times. In Mystras, the visitor can learn about the importance of the olive tree for the Orthodox tradition, by experiencing the use of olive oil to light the candles of the ancient churches of the UNESCO site. The Routes of the Olive Tree uses these experiences to differentiate themselves, especially from experiences that, while trying to be similar under the esthetic aspects, are considered as divergent for their significance and for their educational aspects. Moreover, these experiences are considered, other than different, as “fake”, inauthentic”, while being authentic is argued to be an integral part of the visitor experience of the Routes of the Olive Tree. The strategy for staging such different experience on route relies, mainly, on the contribution of the local community, volunteers, and specific informative materials. Our field work evidenced that the use of such tools is, in several cases, showed issues which threaten the capacity for the Routes of the Olive Tree to make an effective use of experiences to achieve the desired differentiation.

4.9. The use of experiences to market the Routes of the Olive Tree

We already pointed out that, in order to efficiently market themselves through experiences, organizations should conduct a rigorous market analysis and exploit tools able to deliver aspects of the experience. Particularly for route tourism, marketers should focus on delivering consistent messages of the route experience along the route and in the promotional material, in order for the visitor to interpret it correctly. This messages should be delivered throughout visual devices, and

stories, which should make use of an evocative language, colors, sensorial cues, and they should be connected with the theme of the route.

The Routes of the Olive Tree does not conduct any market analysis, as this is something that the Cultural Foundation feels unable to do. Tools potentially able to market the route experience, building a two-way communication with the visitor, are not exploited, with the exception of the organization of experiential events, which are used by the Routes of the Olive Tree as a main tool to attract visitors, as well as to promote the organization's focus on promoting an open, intercultural dialogue. Yet, due to this last aspect, these events are not addressed to specific markets. The Routes of the Olive Tree delivers brochures, greeting cards and informative material to visitors, related with the route experience, which, although thematized, they make use of a language only partly experiential. Moreover, inconsistencies in the language style between different materials has been highlighted with, for instance, the website being more "rational" and some of the brochures being more "evocative". Inconsistences have been detected even in the messages that the Routes of the Olive Tree delivers to visitors, mainly because of the prioritization given to the message delivered to the local community, due to the reasons explained above.

Because of its nature of a non-profit organization, the Cultural Foundation does not believe to be able to execute directly marketing operations such as market analysis. Accordingly, the Cultural Route is considered as a tool for regional development, alongside a tourism product: therefore attracting visitors by marketing experiential messages is only one of the aspects to consider in the use of potential tools such as the website or the events. Still, the Routes of the Olive Tree recognized that its willingness to market the route experience, although present, is undermined by several factors that are beyond their direct control.

4.10. Challenges and issues detected

The complex nature of our cultural route in exam as well as the challenging environment in which it operates, plays a major role in undermining the capacity of the Routes of the Olive Tree to use experiences to market and differentiate itself, as intended by the present literature. In the majority of occasions, the Routes of the Olive Tree reported multiple difficulties in networking with possible partners, due to different views or the perceived unwillingness to cooperate: this was the case, for example, with KCVB, the municipality of Kalamata and with local travel agencies such as the one in exam. Yet, on the other hand, the necessity of networking is vital for the Routes of

the Olive Tree to execute functions of sales, marketing and obtain funds. This affects the capacity of the Routes of the Olive Tree to market the Route experience and to reach specific target markets, and the use they can make of visitor centers as experience staging tools. The lack of funds affects their capacity to produce relevant and coherent experiential material, such as brochures, information about the attractions and the itineraries, as well as signage and proper display tools along the itineraries. This is summed with a general lack of expertise, with the exception of the events, in managing cost-effective tools such as the broadcast of WOM, internet and social media to deliver the route experience as intended in the literature.

Theming, staging and in general the experience differentiation are greatly affected by the recognized lack of direct control over the geography of the route and its attractions, which weaken the theme consistency and coherence and the differentiated experiential aspects that are intended to be provided to the visitor. For example, without the possibility for the Routes of the Olive Tree to control the stage of the experience in Mystras and Ancient Messene, the intended, differentiated experience that is designed for such attractions cannot be delivered, as inconsistent and incoherent cues are provided. This results in the visitor being targeted by messages, types of languages, and themes of different nature, derived from various attractions, local community members and visitor centers. This lack of control affects, as well, the perceived ability of the Routes of the Olive Tree to broadcast positive WOM about the route experience, and, in general, to manage the visitor experience.

5. QUALITY OF RESEARCH

Yin (2013) identifies four commonly used criteria for evaluating the quality of empirical social research, and therefore of case study: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. In our case, we will not account internal validity, since it is used for explanatory or causal studies and seeks to establish a causal relationship (Ibid). Considering that our case study is of exploratory nature, in this section we will evaluate our research based on construct validity, external validity and reliability.

5.1. Construct validity

5.1.1. Triangulation

Most criticism about case study research falls under the "conventional wisdom" of the case study as a weak research method because of the research being arbitrary and subjective and not able to provide credible and accurate findings, since it reflects the researcher's (our) own interpretations, leading therefore to accusations of bias (Flyvbjerg 2006:2; Yin 2013). A strong argument that counteracts these accusations lies on the fact that we used triangulation, which is said to be "a quality assurance tactic to ensure that case study research is based on a disciplined approach and not simply a matter of intuition, good intention and common sense" (Stake 1995:107). In general, using data and/or methodological triangulation is recommended as a technique for construct validity (Denzin 1978; Dewalt and Dewalt, 2002; Baxter and Jack, 2008; Farquhar 2012). By using triangulation, the research findings are strengthened as the investigation of the case of the Routes of the Olive Tree from different perspectives provides strong foundations for the findings and supports arguments for its contribution to knowledge (Farquhar 2012).

Hence, we did not simply build our analysis on what our participants said, but we entered the field, we took the role of 'inspectors', collected brochures and other kinds of material, checked the internet for available information (something that the reader can also do) and, combining all these, we tried to establish and verify meaning. Besides, as also Baxter and Jack (2008) argue, the collection and comparison of data enhances data quality based on the principles of idea convergence and the confirmation of findings. Following the Routes of the Olive Tree by ourselves and doing participant observation certainly helped us have a better understanding of the context of the Cultural Route and improved the quality of data collection and interpretation. Finally construct

validity is stronger with the use of additional methods used along observation, such as interviewing (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002).

5.1.2. Collaborative analysis

Since investigator triangulation was also used in this thesis, it is noteworthy to describe the way the researchers worked together. A typical issue of multi-researcher projects, which feature different points of view, is that researchers generally do not produce an integrated result that profit from the different perspectives (Moran-Ellis et al. 2006). On the other hand, this research attempts to implement what Cornish et al. (2014) define as collaborative data analysis, meaning a process "in which there is a joint focus and dialogue among two or more researchers regarding a shared body of data, to produce and agreed interpretation" (2014:79). In fact, though the researchers shared the need to enclose both suspicious and empathic interpretations, the reader is presented with the result of a continuous dialogue between the different researcher's perspectives. Alhough we are both students of the same master program, our perspectives are recognized to differ, according to a wide array of factors, including nationality and theoretical tradition (Cornish et al. 2014; Akkerman et al. 2006; Tartas and Mirza 2007). This is in accordance, also, with our constructivist stance, that see the observer's point of view as distinctive, socially constructed, and of different investments, preoccupations and stances (Guba 1990). We are convinced our collaborative interpretation to have enabled a list of positive contributes to our research:

- Although we do not believe it is possible for us to distance ourselves from such point of view and biases by simply combining our two perspective together, we agree (and personally experienced) on how such combination enhanced critical reflection on our different interpretations (Gillespie 2012; Cornish et al. 2014). It happened many times that researchers contrasted respective socio-cultural and emotional constructions, which led us to different interpretations of the data. This helped in recognizing and criticizing our own biases (Musante and DeWalt 2010).
- In many cases one of the researcher was playing the role of an auditor, during the data coding, and the researchers collaborated in the whole coding process, which is argued to enhance rigor, systematicity, clarity and transparency of the results (Hall et al. 2005; Cornish et al. 2014). As our corpse of data was particularly large, collaborative analysis assisted us in keeping consistency (Ibid) helping in addressing one of the already cited

major pitfalls of holistic case study researches (Yin 2013; Baxter and Jack 2008). On the other hand, our agreement does not necessarily enhance research validity, because it might be that we simply share the same limited assumptions (Cornish et al. 2014).

Although collaborative analysis is argued to increase the overall research's quality, some challenges need to be acknowledged. Collaborative analysis can be affected by the lack of time and resources (Erickson and Stull 1998; Hall et al. 2005), as well as ignoring, or silencing each other, instead of acknowledging differences (Akkerman et. al. 2006). We should not of course ignore the fact that collecting data in Greek and presenting the findings in English has a direct impact on the validity of the research (Birbili 2000). We tried to address all these recognized issues while interpreting our results. As a side note, the reader should be aware that the researchers have collaborated with each other in previous research projects, a fact that contributed in our awareness of the aforementioned pitfalls.

5.1.3. Case study as a method of learning

We realize and acknowledge the existence of subjectivity and multiple realities as well as the existence of our biases, assumptions, opinions and prejudices (Bryman 2008). However, as also Flyvbjerg (2006) argues, it is not valid to say that, due to our subjectivity, a case study cannot provide reliable information, as everything is context-related and all knowledge is context dependent. In our research, it is acknowledged that our own implementation as well as the context has produced the observed impacts, without this meaning that this is a negative fact. We consider our research to be, first of all, important for our personal learning process, since it provided us the opportunity to gather concrete first-hand context-dependent experience and knowledge of a complex social phenomenon (the use of experiences for a cultural route) in a real-life setting, while developing skills needed to do good research (Ibid). Besides, Merriam (1998:19) points out that "the interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable".

Moreover, Flyvbjerg (2006:6) aptly argues: "Social science has not succeeded in producing general, context-independent theory and has thus in the final instance nothing else to offer than concrete, context-dependent knowledge". This can only be achieved by continued proximity to the studied reality, as distance easily leads to a "stultified learning process" (Ibid:6). Flew and Priest (2002) support this argument by stating that social science puts itself at risk, by implication at least, as to what is observed under specific circumstances. It is therefore, again the context that produces new knowledge and enriches social sciences. Therefore, we consider case study research

to be well suited to producing such context-dependent knowledge, as by placing ourselves with the context being studied, we could better understand various viewpoints and behaviors.

5.1.4. Bias towards verification

One of the main misunderstandings about case study, is that it maintains a bias towards verification, which is understood as a tendency to confirm our aforementioned preconceived notions, and consequently becomes of doubtful scientific value (Diamond 1996; Flyvbjerg 2006). We claim such critique to be fallacious because the question of subjectivism and bias toward verification can apply, without exception, to all methods (Campbell 1975; Flyvbjerg 2006). Although the alleged deficiency of case studies (but also other qualitative methods) that they perhaps allow more room for the researchers' subjective judgment than quantitative methods (Flyvbjerg 2006) is recognized, it is argued that the bias towards verification is general. Not only it is actually general but as it is stated by Campbell (1975) and Flyvbjerg (2006) qualitative analysis in case studies tend to disconfirm rather than confirm the findings. Merriam (1998) also puts the interest of case study in discovery rather than confirmation. It would be quite unlikely if each separate proposition that we set and observed was exactly as expected (Campbell 1975) and therefore, we were from the very beginning interested in identifying and analyzing challenges about the way the Routes of the Olive Tree uses experiences to market and differentiate itself.

5.2. External validity

A very common critique of a single case study research is the limitations of providing no grounds for generalizing the findings as it cannot provide reliable information about a broader population (Abercrombie et al. 1984; Sarantakos 2005). Yin (2013) counters this by highlighting that it is actually possible to generalize from case studies (either single or multiple) by applying "analytical generalization" that is to say by generalizing the findings not to larger populations but to a broad variety of other "like-cases" with the purpose to expand or generate theory. However, since we strongly argue that the knowledge we have produced is context-dependent, we do not agree with this view.

On the other hand, it has been argued that it is still possible to generalize by using *falsification*, the type of test Karl Popper introduced for case studies and which "forms part of critical reflexivity" in social sciences (Flyvbjerg 2006:11). According to Karl Popper's philosophy of science, the distinctive feature of any scientific theory can be put to a test and falsification can be a way with

which scientific propositions can be subjected (Mautner 2000; Flyvbjerg 2006; Flew and Priest 2002). Popper used the very famous example of "All swans are white" and suggested that the observation of one single black swan could falsify this proposition. In this sense, if just one observation does not fit with our theoretical propositions, then it can be said that it is not valid and that they need to be revised or rejected (Flyvbjerg 2006). Therefore, case studies can be accepted as insights and can represent a significant contribution to knowledge and theory-building by confirming, extending or challenging theory (Eisenhardt 1989; Flyvbjerg 2006; Yin 2013).

Considering all above, we need to underline that in this current research we do not reject any theory neither we intend to build our own. We rather attempt to stimulate further investigations in the area of the use of experiences for cultural routes as we have identified a number of observations that are inconsistent with what our theories suggest destinations do/should do to differentiate themselves.

For instance, one of our most important findings indicates, that since the Cultural Foundation has different goals than increasing the market share, instead of building experiences that cover all four realms/areas at the same time, the Routes of the Olive Tree intends to successfully differentiate itself by mostly focusing on the Educational realm, including some esthetic and escapist elements. This is certainly not to say that all cultural routes focus or should focus on the educational area in order to differentiate themselves. What we can however argue is that at least one –the Routes of the Olive Tree- uses experiences in this way in order to achieve differentiation itself from mass tourism as well as from other similar offers. In this case our theoretical proposition was falsified and we suggest for better refinement of our theory.

Our observation allowed us to challenge certain other theories, which generate knowledge about the uses of experience in the tourism field without taking into consideration problematic issues which may exist 'out there' such as the complexity of destinations and more especially of cultural routes, which are said to be "systems of systems" (Berti 2013). Our experience showed that there is a number of other, if we can argue, 'black swans' and, therefore, we suggest that the academic world considers a number of factors which may influence tourism organizations' uses of experiences, such as the goals of the organizations, the degree of control and other dimensions (e.g. expertise) and practical matters (e.g. funding).

Consequently, the fact that knowledge cannot be formally generalized "does not mean that it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation" (Flyvbjerg 2006:10) in the

field of experiential marketing for cultural routes. Therefore, it can be supported that our single case study research has a valid role and is a sufficient method for certain important research tasks in the tourism field. We can also argue that that case studies are essential research methods, suitable for challenging extant theories and since no similar investigation has been conducted in the field of cultural routes, we consider our exploratory case study to have a general significance.

5.3. Reliability

Realibility refers to the fact that if a researcher follows the same procedures as described by us earlier and conducts the exact same case study over again, then s/he will arrive at the same findings and conclusion (Yin 2013). Considering our constructivist paradigm and taking into account the existence of multiple ways of interpretations, constructions of knowledge and analysis (Bryman 2008), it becomes evident that it would not be possible to 'replicate' the results by doing the same case study research for the second time. Although in order to deal with the documentation problem, we made use of a case study protocol and a case study database, which can possibly maximize reliability (Yin 2013), we still argue that the exact same research done by a different investigator would mean that we are doing two different researches.

6. Concluding remarks and suggestions for further research

The purpose of this case study research was to provide comprehensive, context-dependent knowledge about the use that our cultural route in exam makes of experiences in order to achieve differentiation and to market itself. Before addressing such investigation, some relevant theoretical concepts have been individuated and elaborated to guide our research: in particular, our research focused on the use of different aspects of the experience, on theming, the conveyance of the message(s) of the route experience and the use of different staging and marketing tools.

Many challenges and issues have been, consequently, detected, which affect the capacity, for the Routes of the Olive Tree, to build a comprehensive experiential marketing strategy based on the aspects delineated in the literature and, therefore, to use experiences to market and differentiate itself. On the other hand, our findings indicate that the Routes of the Olive Tree presents a themed route experience that is clearly alleged as valuable, authentic, and this is what is attempted to be delivered to visitors, when possible and feasible.

As already discussed, we do not attempt to generalize our findings on other cultural routes, as we believe the knowledge provided in this research to be highly context-dependent. Nevertheless, areas for further research can be highlighted as a consequence of our outcomes. Marketing and differentiating basing on experiences showed some clear potentials for our cultural route in exam, particularly for what concerns authenticity, the experience as a source of differentiation and the involvement of the local community as a powerful staging tool. In addition, given the persistent issue of funding that affects our route in exam, more research on the use of cost-effective marketing tools such as WOM, social media and internet, specifically applied on cultural routes, is required. Moreover, the organizational nature of the Routes of the Olive Tree raised some questions regarding the capacity of NGOs and non-profit organizations to operate similarly to destinations and private businesses in the marketing and management of a visitor experience. Therefore, more research is required to address these organizations' challenges and opportunities in relation with the emerging experience economy. This is valid as well for cultural routes, as a tourism product, given their disperse nature and their acknowledged complexity.

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Routes of the Olive Tree

http://olivetreeroute.gr

Agora of the Routes of the Olive Tree

http://agora-med.eu/?page_id=1450

Facebook Group - Οι Δρόμοι της Ελιάς - The Routes of the Olive Tree

https://www.facebook.com/OliveTreeRoutes/?fref=ts

Twitter – Olivetreeroutes

https://twitter.com/Olivetreeroutes

Google + - Δρόμοι της Ελιάς / The Routes of the Olive Tree

https://plus.google.com/+OlivetreerouteGr/posts

Kalamata Convention and Visitors Bureau

http://www.discovermessinia.gr

Trigilidas Travel Holidays

http://www.trigilidas.com

*All the online sources have been found available as of 7th of June 2015

8. APPENDIX

APPENDIX A – CASE STUDY PROPOSITIONS

THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS	SOURCE *These are only examples of literature and do not reflect a full literature review.	FINDINGS
Experience is a central concept in designing marketing and differentiating	Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Schmitt 1999; Tynan and McKechnie 2010; Hulten 2011; Feng and Lee 2013; Majdoub 2010; Lagiewski and Zekan 2005	Yes. The kind of experience they provide is important for them. They value the quality of the experience.
The goal is to create holistic experiences (a holistic gestal)	Schmitt 1999; Majdoub 2011	No.
The focus is on four realms/areas of experience- **Esthetic, Escapism, Educational, Entertainment** at the same time	Pine and Gilmore 1999; Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Lagiewski and Zekan 2006; Williams 2006; Jurowski 2009	No. The focus is mostly on Education
They focus on one or two of the experiential realms due to **lack of resources**	Fiore et al. 2007	No. The most important is to communicate the significance of the experience
Interaction and active participation is what matters the most	Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Richards and Bonink 1994; Li and Li 2011; Strategic Direction 2008; Li and Li 2011	No. This is not the focus. What matters is the quality of the experience
They put a lot of emphasis on the **senses**	Schmitt 1999; Lagiewski and Zekan 2006; Gentile et al., (2007)	Yes. The focus of the route strategy is in many occasions ACT or SENSE
Authenticty is a highly important aspect to consider	Pine and Gilmore 2007; Murray et al. 2010; Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011; Prentice 2001; Murray et al. 2010; Hall 1999	Yes. Authenticity plays a role in the route's experience and differentiation
Theme of the route is well-defined, unifying, common and coherent and is carried out throughout the route experience	Pine and Gilmore 1999; Lagiewski and Zekan 2006; Williams 2006; Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Khovanova-	No. There is the issue of control. Theming does not directly connect all the attractions

	Rubicondo et al. 2011; Mosberg 2007; Schneider 2004; Nagy 2012	
Theming is a great challenge	UNWTO 2015; Lagiewski and Zekan 2006; Kalandides 2011; Kim et al. 2000; Piskóti and Nagy 2014	Yes. Indeed
Theming influences message design and carries differentiation	Sugio 2005; Hayes and MacLeod 2006	No
The Route takes a community-sustainable approach	Khovanova-Rubicondo et al.; 2011; UNWTO 2015; Piskóti and Nagy 2014	Yes. The Route is made entirely "for the local community"
Messages along the route (signage design for roads and sites, brochures, visitor centers) are about the route experience	Lagiewski and Zekan 2006; Majdoub 2010; Hayes and Macleod 2006	No. The messages are not coherent, they do not control them
They assess the impression/message/significance the visitors should get	Lagiewski and Zekan 2006; Mariotti 2012; Hardy 2003; Tynan and McKechnie 2010	Yes. They seem to take into consideration what visitors get out of this
Messages should be educational and entertaining	Poulson and Kale 2004; Hardy 2003	No. The emphasis is exclusively on education
Messages should be **coherent**	Majdoub 2010; Schmitt 1999; Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Williams 2006; Fiore et al. 2007	No. There is a total chaos.
They provide '**positive cues'** and operate for eliminating negative cues	Pine and Gilmore 1999; Williams 2006; Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Fiore et al. 2007	No. They cannot eliminate anything that is inconsistent with the unity of the theme. They do not have the control
Theming affects the staging of the experience	Pine and Gilmore 1999	Yes
They use **evocative language**, **compelling stories** and **visual devices** that promote the connection between communities, culture and attractions	Hayes and Macleod 2006; Zarantonello et al. 2013; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Schmitt 1999	No. The Cultural Foundation alone cannot control the kind of language that the visitors receive. However, the Foundation does not seem to produce material that effectively enhance the route experience. There is also the issue of funding

They engage in a 'dialogue' with the costumers, they embrace **co-creation**	Tynan and McKechnie 2009; Smilansky 2009; Akyıldız et al. 2013; Majdoub 2010; Cox et al. 2009	No. There is not that much dialogue.
They consider **events** as an important tool	Akyıldız et al. 2013; Dimanche 2008; Smilansky 2009	Yes. Very much advanced tool in use by the organization: they have expertise, and it is a lot experiential.
They make effective use of **social media**.	Cox et al. 2009; Khovanova-Rubicondo et al. 2011; Leung et al. 2013; Lu and Stepchenkova 2015; Tham et al. 2013; Leung et al. 2013	No. The route experience is not broadcasted through social media, UGC is not encouraged, there is no dialogue, no exchange. No action is initiated by the Organization. Lack of expertise, time and resources
They make effective use of **internet**	Cox et al. 2009; Leung, et al. 2013; Tham et. al, 2013; Hayes and MacLeod 2006; Gretzel and Fesenmeier 2003; Hardy 2003; Nagy 2012	No. They suffer from a lack of expertise. Their capacity is limited. Website is not a reliable, and updated source of information. So they use the website mainly to bring people to communicate with them via email. No experiential marketing is delivered throughout internet.

APPENDIX B – CASE STUDY PROTOCOL

Phase A - Overview of the case study	**Objectives**: Understand how does the Routes of the Olive Tree use experiences to market and differentiate itself. What are the challenges, and the issues, that are relevant to consider. Explore experiential marketing for this cultural route Keep in mind triangulation: between different methods, between different sources, between different theories, between us. And the propositions. Field work is <u>theory driven but we should look for gaps</u> *-Areas of Experience, Authenticity, Theming, How do they represent the Route experience, how do they communicate its messages, staging tools, marketing tools*. **Expected issues**: bad weather condition may not allow participant observation, denied access to attractions, cancelation of interviews, recording devices not working, loss of documents and field notes, injuries and accidents. Public transports not working, impossible to reach the attractions by scooter. **Propositions (relevant readings, theoretical background)**: see Appendix A **Feasibility** on the basis of the planned costs confirmed if funds are received. Alternative plans: switch to different methodologies of data collection (semi-structured interviews + netnography) and maybe a multiple case study approach (between different routes). Routes of the Olive Tree agreed on signing the 'Organization Statement' document before applying for the funds for short trip abroad. Next stage is: make trip arrangements and discuss potential costs. Update: Funds have been received and the feasibility of the study confirmed.
Phase B - Data collection procedures	**<u>Data collection plan:</u>** <u>Athens</u>: semi-structured interview with Ms. Kazazaki (head of the Scientific committee). Other procedures in Athens not needed, Athens is not part of the case study and it is not covered by the Route. Location is casual. Accommodation at Ioanna's father's place. Alternative location: two places of Ioanna's friends. Travel to Kalamata can happen by bus at two different times, depending on Ms. Kazazaki's interview. Alternative transport: train. <u>Kalamata:</u> Days planned to be spent in Kalamata/Messinia/Laconia: 8. Accommodation: couchsurfing. Alternative plan: b&b in Kalamata Key contact person in Kalamata: Marinela Katsilleri (Routes of the Olive Tree). Phone contact (+30) 27210 95620. Adresss of the Cultural Foundation: Aristomenous 9 Tasks involved on the field: ➢ Negotiate plan of action, arrange regular access and ask for other arrangements. ➢ Discuss arrangements for maintaining confidentiality of data, sources, reports ➢ Discuss publicity to be given during and following the study - **Interviews** with Ms. Katsilleri (Head of Communication), Mr. Karabatos (President of the route), Mr. Trigilidas (Manager of the travel agency "Trigilidas"), Ms. Paloglou (Head of the Kalamata Convention & Visitor Bureau). Interviews are possible only in the morning and early afternoon, but also early evening with personell of Cultural Foundation. Office stay open from 9am-9pm. Schedule open for new participants. *New participants*: Mrs and Mr. Skarpalezos (of Skarpalezos Olive mills), Ms. Bovicelli (volunteer in Ancient Messene) (unstructured). Locations: Cultural Route premises, KCVB, travel agency Trigilidas. All the locations as accessible on foot in the city center. All interviews confirmed. All interviews collected. All interviews recorded with the exception of the volunteer at Ancient

	Messene and Mrs and Mr Skarpalezos. Recordings saved on the database as soon as possible to avoid losses. Expected days to spend interviewing: 6 (accounting for participants' schedule). - **Field notes** should be taken in: cultural route's premises, KCVB and Trigilidas headquarters, municipality visitor center. **Attractions**:The Museum of Olive and Greek Olive Oil (Sparta) –Archeological site of Mystras (Mystras) – Olive harvesting at olive grove (out of season) Skarpalezos OliveMill (Stauropigio) Ruins of olive mill and soap factory of Liakea (Kardamili) – The Old town of Kardamyli – Ancient Messene (archeological site and museum) – Palace of Nestor (Ancient Pylos) (not reachable). – Chora (archeological museum) (not reachable). – Koroni (port and castle) (not reachable). ~~-Olympia~~, (not available) Itineraries can be covered by scooter. Rent of the scooter confirmed to be available in Kalamata, even on Sunday. Alternative transport: public bus to each attraction. Considerations needed, in such case, regarding the possibility to take notes along the route, because maybe the bus won't follow the route, just reach the attractions. Devices in use: smartphones (recording + pictures), paper, pens (field notes). Scooter rent was possible but it allowed us to go to two attractions. Stauropigio and Kardamyli were covered for the entire path this way. For Sparti, Mystras and Ancient Messene, it was not possible to be covered by scooter, therefore public transport was needed. Still, the bus could cover also part of the track. Services available: data roaming, GPS. External batteries for the smartphones (smartphones used for recording + taking pictures + GPS + consultation of the websites while on site). Expected days to spend for attractions assessment: 4 (2 Sparta + Mystras, 1 Messene, 1 Stauropigio- Kardamyli). Notes discussed at the end of the days, expanded with laptop, and stored in the database. This was not possible after assessing Skarpalezos Olive mill and Kardamyli, so it was done the morning after. **Where to look for interesting data: physical setting, participants, activities and interactions, conversations, subtle factors, items** - **Documents**: to be collected at the attractions, on the way, at the organization's quarters, KCVB, Trigilidas, **and on the websites**. Ask Marinella, but also to other participants at the end and during the interview. Make the purpose clear. Note the role of each document with a post it attached on it, to avoid confusion. Take extensive pictures of the documents at the end of the day and note, electronically, its role, to avoid losses. Put it in the database. This was possible only certain days. No losses detected.
Phase C - Data collection questions	**Questions to bear in mind on the field – what are we looking for:** **Experience: -** what is the role of authenticity; - is there anything that the Route value as authentic; how authenticity is built and is it part of the experience? Can I identify esthetic, escapist, educational and entertainment areas? Are they trying to build a route experience that encompass all 4 realms? Is the lack of resources a problem? In general, is the route experience important in differentiating them? **Theming:** Does the route envision a coherent, consistent theme that connects all the attractions? How is such theme communicated? Is it community-sustainable? In general, what is the role of the local community in theming the experience? **Communication:** How is the route experience communicated? What is the message of the route experience that the visitor should get? Inconsistencies/incongruences? **Brochures/informative material/website:** evocative/rational? Experiential words? Pictures – presence of the theme, connection with route experience and informal

	elements? Storytelling- are stories told about the route experience? What about the material not produced by the Routes of the Olive Tree? **Staging tools:** role of the visitor centers? Are positive cues provided? Of what kind? What about negative cues, are they eliminated/addressed/countered? Connection with the theme? What kind of staging tools can be identified? (educational programs, lectures, informative material, local community members - volunteers, display tools such as signage and panels, scenery- landscape) **Marketing tools:** Are WOM, social media, internet and events exploited by the Routes of the Olive Tree in terms of experience sales/marketing? Any evidence of two-way interactions? Do they deliver the route experience? Do they connect potential visitors with brand ambassadors? Internet – Does it offer occasions to personalize the experience? Any possibility to share impressions, or UGC?

APPENDIX C – INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

Information about the Olive Tree: (Let them tell us what they think it's important)

Product offer: What is what gives the Olive Tree Route a memorable and diversified experience? What are the strong aspects? If you have to think of the inventory of this route, which assets would you consider? (eg. infrastructure, suppliers, activities, events?)

Do you have partners in creating the route? How do you do this?

In your opinion, why is it important to develop a Cultural Route like this? What is the rationale behind developing this?

Is there any part (aspect, activity) of the Olive Tree Route that you can describe as authentic? If so, what makes it such? If not, what could make the stay authentic?

Message

How the Olive Tree Route exactly wants to be perceived in the visitors' minds? What impression do you want them to have? What is the message you want to convey?
What impression do you think they eventually form?
Do you think there is one single message the potential tourist gains or there is a coexistence of different messages?

Does the message stimulate sensory excitement?

Do visitors actually learn something? Are there opportunities for enjoyment /learning? If yes, are experiences both entertaining and educational at the same time?

Areas of experience

Do you assess all the aspects of visitor experience along the route, particularly in terms of active and/or passive participation? How?
How do you decide which kinds of visitor experience should be promoted for a specific attraction along the route?
So the visitor experience a visit on a Olive mill. What do they actually do there? Do you assess all areas of experience along the route?

What do visitors actually do in these activities (eg. Olive oil mills)? Are they immersed in activities? Do they actively participate? (Other examples-activities: olive oil mills from all time periods, museums, archeological sites, soap factory, small churches, restaurants, events-festivals

Themes

How would you best define the Olive Tree Route? (eg. cultural route, gastronomic ?)
What is the theme or themes of the Olive Tree Route? How many themes are there?

What makes the theme/s compelling, captivating and memorable? Is there an area for improvement in order to make it more captivating and appealing to the visitors?

Do you think that local stakeholders all know what themes of experience they are attempting to deliver and understand how to do so?

Is there agreement/ disagreement over the theme/s?
Is agreement over the theme/s easy/hard to succeed?
What is the opinion of the local community?

Visitor market

What do you know about trends in cultural tourism in general?

Who is most likely to come and participate in these activities? Why?

What do you know about these visitor markets?

Who is in charge of defining the market of the Olive Tree Route?

Is it acknowledgeable the fact that there could exist conflicts between different visitor motivations and segments? Is there any acknowledged conflict?

Staging experience

How can visitors experience the theme on route? Can visitors find visitor centers, panels/signage/maps along the route?

What is the role of restaurants, accommodation providers, transportations, festivals, markets, cafes and pubs? Do they help visitors to experience the theme of the route?

What role colors, sounds, smells, animation, interaction that current and potential visitors see play in the Olive Tree Route?

Do you promote the relationships with local community groups? How? How do stakeholders participate in staging the experience?

Do you use internet and/or volunteers in any way in assisting visitor interpretation of the route, its themes, its experience, while they are on route? Why/why not?

Do you consider the contribution that visitors themselves can give?

Are there souvenir shops along the route? Are there any opportunities for visitors to collect memories of the route? What can trigger the memory of the route in visitors once back at home?

Do visitors give you feedback? How?

What challenges can you identify in staging this experience?

Marketing tools

How can a tourist be informed about the Olive Tree Route?
How can a tourist buy the route experience?
What does the promotional material (website/social media/brochures) about the Olive Tree Routes convey?

What kind of advertising materials and/or PR activities do you use to reach desired visitor markets to inform them about the Olive Tree Route and its offer?

Are you using social media in promoting the route? Which ones? (Linkedin, Instagram, Facebook, Youtube, twitter, etc.)
What kind of information can one find about the itineraries on the official website of the Olive Tree Route?

Final Questions
Can you identify areas of improvement?
And any challenges?

* Appendix D, E and F can be found in the DVD-ROM